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ALL OVER THE PLACE

ALL OVER THE PLACE

*The true record of the Author's striking
and varied experiences in many
parts of the World*

by

CAPTAIN ERNEST HYATT

This is the autobiography of a wanderer who has been many things in his time. Apprenticed to a sea-life in a windjammer, he grew up in the days when sail gave way to steam, roughed it in Australia, went back to deep-water, skippered river-steamers on the Irrawaddy, making regular trips from Rangoon to Mandalay, went to Africa, nearly died of black-water fever, returned to England, but, unable to rest, and knowing someone in Canada, made his way to Regina. There he decided to become a Mountie.



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To
THE LEGION OF FRONTIERSMEN

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ALL OVER THE PLACE

CHAPTER I

A HARD SHIP

WHERE to begin? Where shall I commence this story of my adventures, ranging as they do from those of a blue-water-sailor-man on all the seven seas to those of a gun-boat captain on the Tigris and Euphrates; from adventuring variously in Australia and Nigeria to chasing Esquimo murderers in the Canadian North-West. It seems to me I can't do better than start off with my first going to sea, in a three-masted barque, which I shall here call the *Colonia*, bound from Frederickstad to Melbourne with pine boards.

She was a miserable ship, ill-found and ill-kept, with the toughest gang of a crew that ever you set eyes upon. She was British owned, and the captain and officers were British, but the for'ard hands were a fine old medley of Danes, Norwegians, and Dutch, with a sprinkling of nationalities difficult to determine, recruited from the lowest waterside dens.

Now the *Colonia* was not the sort of ship for which it was easy to get crews. She had a name for meanness and hard driving, and when a ship gets a name like that it's much the same as when a mistress with a bad name sends round to the registry office for a servant. There's a cry of

"Nothing doing!" In consequence, the *Colonia* had to take the best crew she could get; that is to say, the only crew she could get.

Many of the hands had been in gaol at various times, and there were two, an Italian and a Greek, whom few of even the hardest-bitten sailing-ship skippers would have been willing to sign on. The Italian had been mixed up in at least two mutinies, for which he had served eight years' imprisonment. The Greek—who had once held a master's certificate, but had lost it long since—had served two sentences for wounding, and with that as a kind of training, as you might say, enlisted in the Foreign Legion. He escaped from the Legion, and even about that there was something unpleasant. There were two of them who escaped, and together started on the long trek across the desert. But when the coast was reached the Greek was alone, and the other fellow was never heard of again. It was hinted that they had got stuck for water, and it was only by using his mate's share that the Greek was able to reach the coast, where he stowed away on a British ship, and so finally escaped. From what I saw of the fellow on the *Colonia*, I certainly wouldn't have put it past him.

Another of this choice gang of sailors had deserted ship a few years before in the South Seas, and taken to trading and a couple of native wives. But in the end he had to clear out suddenly from the Islands, because in a fit of temper one day he strangled one of his wives. I several times heard him tell the story in the dog-watches there on board the *Colonia*. He was a flat-faced fellow, a German, with a broad nose that looked as if it had been

spread in some peculiar accident, and his English was so interlarded with profanity that, listening, you couldn't help but think that he imagined the swear-words to be merely an English way of expressing great emphasis.

I have had quite a wide experience of swearers and swearing, but I've never heard anyone use naughty words in such an over-emphatic way as did that German. He used them in the same way that a modern young woman, telling a friend of a party she had been to, might use the word *awfully* in the sentence: "It was *awfully* jolly." I can't, of course, put on paper the German's choice expressions, though they were very much the sort of words that in police-courts are handed up to the Bench on pieces of paper; but, leaving out the naughty words, his story of the killing of his wife went like this:

"Ya! She vos a nice girl ven I bought her from her old fader, the Chief. You *buy* the vives there, you know, vitch is a very good thing, if they not too dear. The only thing is that it is hard to sell them ven you tired of them. They say you haf used the woman and spoiled her!

"I paid her fader for her a case of tobacco, half a ton of rice, a gross of sheath-knives, and oder things. Pretty dear! But she was young—ah! Yet after six months I wanted to sell her again. Ya! I wanted to get rid of her. She did not'ing but talk at me. You know—vat is the English vord?—nag. Yes—nag, that is the vord. She nagged me, nagged me, nagged me. It is not only vite vimmen who know to nag.

"I couldn't look after the trading proper because

of the way she nagged me. The natives they took their copra and coco-nuts to oder traders. In six more months I hardly got any business left. I tried to sell her, but nobody vanted to buy. My oder vife, she vos all right before, but now she start to nag me, too. She vos catching the habit from the first vun! Then vun day I lose my temper. Ya! I caught hold of that nagging voman by the throat and squeeze and squeeze and shake and shake, like that. Perhaps I not meant to kill her, but only give her fright. But before I knew it, she vos dead. The necks of vimmen they are not strong. There vos a great row with the natives, and some of them vent off in their canoes to the Commissioner's. But the Commissioner's island was to vindvard, and the canoes struck bad weather and vos a long time getting there—vitch vos lucky for me. I vos able to get in my cutter and clear out to Newcastle, Australia, and there I changed my name and signed on a ship bound for Callao with coal, and I nefer went back to the Islands no more. I vos very sorry. It vos a good life."

His one great terror was that a ship he might be on would one day call at the Islands where this tragedy had happened—the Cook Group, it was—and he would be arrested. Often he would dream that this had actually happened, and cry out and kick up such a fuss that his mates would be awakened in their bunks and throw things at him to quiet him. So, I suppose, he hadn't altogether escaped punishment for his crime.

These were the sort of men who made up the bulk of the ship's company on my first trip to sea.

But I thought it all wonderful. This, I thought, was Life with a capital L. It must not be thought, however, that I was a raw landlubber or anything of that sort. I was not. Though on this ship I was only a sixteen-years-old apprentice, I had already had two years on a training-ship. This was on H.M.S. *Worcester*, where I was first trained for the sea as a cadet. H.M.S. *Worcester* is the Thames Nautical Training College, for the training of youths as executive officers in the maritime services, and combining special nautical and commercial subjects with a public school education. The training counts as one year's sea service to certificated cadets, and appointments are granted by the Admiralty to the Royal Navy and the Royal Naval Reserve. Nowadays, the civil aviator is a kind of counterpart of the mercantile marine officer, both having to do with the carrying of passengers, mails and goods, and I understand that the *Worcester* had now begun training boys intending to take up civil aviation as a career. They are given the rank of air cadet. This scheme is under the official patronage of the Royal Aeronautical Society and the Air League of the British Empire. It also has the approval of the Director of Civil Aviation, the Air Ministry and the Board of Trade.

All the same, this was my first real contact with the real life of the sea. I wanted to be a great man, and I reckon the other apprentices thought that way about themselves also. I wished I were grown-up—not grown-up into a man who choked native women or got mixed up in mutinies—but an adult with a good, big lump of a past behind

him that he would talk about, instead of a kid with schoolday and training-ship days only. My little past seemed terribly flat and uninteresting. Heavens, how I looked forward to the day when I'd finished my apprenticeship and got my second mate's ticket, then my mate's, and finally my master's! I used to dream about the ship I would command, see myself on the bridge giving orders—not shouting them out, or making a fuss, but just uttering a quiet little word here and there, which is how the most accomplished ship-masters run their vessels. I had a great feeling for the dignity of the quiet-spoken command.

I must say, though, that the Captain of the *Colonia* was far from being one of the quiet-spoken sort. He was a burly Cockney with the loudest of Cockney voices, and the most choleric temper almost of any man I have known. The least thing would send him into a rage, and many a time were we apprentices given the rope's end and hand-thrashed, for misdeeds so trifling as to merit only a mild rebuke. His officers, good chaps all, frankly disliked him, though they did their best to get on with him.

But the crew absolutely hated him. It was not only that he roared at them—they were used to being roared at—but that he was mean. He had a share in the ship, and tried to run her as cheaply as possible. I have said that the ship was ill-found, but she was ill-found more by design than from carelessness. In the chanties the crew would often make parodies of the lines, so as to turn them into sneers at the ship and her Captain. One chanty that was parodied in this way went:

Her sides were old and her sails were rotten !
Blow, boys, blow !
And the skipper had his charts forgotten !
Blow, boys, bully boys, blow !

Such lines, beefed out a full lung-power in all kinds of mutilated English, by a whole watch on deck as they hove on the gear, made a fine, full-throated insult indeed ! Sometimes the Old Man could stand it no longer, and would bellow back from the poop : “ ’Vast that (awful word) chanty ! You lot of (blank blanks) ! ” And he would go all red in the face, as if he were going to burst. “ They think they’re being funny,” I heard him remark to the mate on one of these occasions. “ Dammit, Mister, sailors like them haven’t got a sense of humour ! They haven’t even got souls ! ” He was working himself up. “ They haven’t even got *gizzards* ! ”

What with bad weather and calms, that passage to Australia was a slow one. There was nothing of the sixty-odd days run, as was done recently by the sailing-vessel *Parma*, from Adelaide to England. We took more like a hundred-and-sixty days. You see, when it comes to even slightly stiffish weather, bad gear holds you up. You’ve got to take in sail to prevent it being blown away. The meanness of the *Colonia*’s owners was a mistake ; it only meant long passages, with the crew’s wages mounting all the time. Of course, the crew were more pleased than otherwise. “ More days, more dollars,” was how they looked at it.

Sometimes it seemed to me as if we would never get there at all. The days dragged. After about a hundred days the sea began to lose some of its

glamour for me. There was, of course, the possibility always of something exciting happening—a mutiny among the crew, for example—but for the rest it was a matter of four hours on and four hours off, all day and every day, Sundays included, with nothing to see but the sea. I had got used to the sight of the deck, and the masts and the sails and the faces of the crew, and the Old Man and the officers and the other apprentices, and would have given anything for a complete change. I'm afraid I am a very restless person.

Then one day I fell overboard. In itself that was nothing extraordinarily exciting. There was no joggle of a sea; only a swell running, and rescue would have been easy enough. But it was extremely exciting all the same. I had fallen in the immediate vicinity of one of the largest sharks I have ever seen!

Only a little while before, working on the poop, I had been looking at the shark's great fin moving slowly just above the water. It looked like the mainsail of a tiny cutter. Others of the ship's company were standing round watching the brute also, and wondering if there was any chance of getting him. In fact, a shark-hook and line had been produced, and one of the men had gone to the galley to see if he could get a piece of salt pork or beef for a bait. A shark like that would be a real capture. There was quite a lot of excitement, though we all kept as quiet as we could so as not to frighten him off.

And then—I hardly know to this day how it happened—I slipped on the slightly curved deck, and the vessel gave a roll, the wrong way for me,

and I shot clean over the side into the water! I thought: "Oh, God!" and tried to clutch the smooth side of the ship. But there was nothing for my fingers to grip, and the ship went slipping past.

It was very hot, tropical weather and the water was quite warm. But I was cold like ice. The shark was about twenty yards away, lying a course at right angles to the ship. He hadn't seen me—yet. The ship was getting farther and farther from me.

For a moment after I hit the water there was a kind of stunned silence on board. Then there was the cry of "Man overboard!" and a buoy came sailing over towards me. Another buoy followed, and I heard the voice of the Old Man giving orders to put the ship up into the wind, and thereby stop her. I could have cursed the whole lot of them. No doubt I did curse them. For, the noise they were making was attracting the shark's attention to me. While all was quiet I had a chance of the creature not noticing me.

But now I saw the fin turn and come in my direction. I saw it out of the side of my eye without turning my head; there's nothing like fear to render a man's senses acute. The shark came straight for me, and I struck out madly for the nearest of the buoys. There was a line on the buoy, held by men on board, and if I could only reach it they would haul away and help me up. It was a race against time and distance.

I was a pretty good swimmer, but I felt I wasn't making progress at all. I was too frightened to kick properly with my feet. There was always a horrible feeling that the next instant my pursuer would grab them.

I distinctly remember trying to keep my feet up as close to my body as possible. That, of course, made my progress slower. Out of the side of my eyes I saw that the shark was steadily coming closer. The fact that he was not hurrying made it seem worse somehow. He seemed so utterly damned sure of himself—sure of making me his victim.

Meanwhile on board the ship there was the greatest excitement. It was no use trying to lower a boat in time, because all the boats were lashed bottom-up on deck. The crew lined the rail, shouting, and throwing things at the shark to scare him away. They threw pieces of coal from the galley cooking-range, and pieces of wood. One man threw an old sea-boot. In sailing past me towards the shark the boot nearly hit me on the head. The pieces of coal came over in showers. But the shark took not the slightest notice. With that nasty certainty of his he came steadily on.

And then, suddenly, the affair was ended. The second mate appeared on the poop with an iron belaying pin in his hand. It was a large weapon, several pounds in weight, and the second mate was a huge man with the strength of a horse. Standing there on the poop, like a Colossus, he whirled that heavy iron pin round and took careful aim at the shark. It was a tremendous moment for me; that big second mate with his strength and skill saved my life during that moment.

The belaying pin struck the shark fairly and squarely, a good solid blow, in spite of the fact that for the last inch or two it had to travel through the water. The shark stopped, hesitated a moment;

then at a sudden increase of the shouting from the ship, and the rain of pieces of coal, he turned and went off. A moment later I reached the buoy, and was hauled safely on board. The whole thing had happened in a very short space of time. The Old Man and the mate had run below for rifles and revolvers, but hardly had time to get them before everything was over. Nevertheless, for me, it had seemed an eternity.

Another incident that made a great impression on me concerned a monkey—a macaque—that belonged to the mate. The monkey was a dear little creature with soft brown eyes, very affectionate and intelligent, and absolutely adored by his master. He was, however, rather mischievous, and sometimes would take things from the mate's cabin and hide them—small articles such as studs, pen-nibs and the like. It was just a game for the animal, and usually the mate took it all in good part; when he found the missing articles he would merely give the little monkey a playful wiggling.

Then one day the mate missed one of his cuff-links, and it happened to be a day when things hadn't been going too well for him generally, and he wasn't quite in his usual good humour. He looked for the monkey and saw him a little way up the rigging, chattering and looking very pleased with himself, as he always did when playing his game of hiding things.

The mate went up after the macaque, which chatted and grinned more excitedly than ever. But the mate wasn't in the mood for any of that. "Where's my sleeve-link, you little devil!" he said, and picking up the monkey he gave him a clip

on the ear. The monkey's expression changed instantly. He looked astounded. His soft eyes widened. "I'll teach you to go pinching things!" said the mate, and cuffed him again, and then again.

The monkey gave a queer cry. He took the cuff-link from his mouth, where he had been hiding it, and handed it over to his master. He looked at the mate for one long second. Then he buried his tiny face in his tiny hands, turned, and sprang overboard to his death. No human suicide could have been more moving.

At last we came to Melbourne and discharged our cargo of timber, with the object of filling up with wheat and taking it to Port Elizabeth, South Africa. When we were unloading a strange phenomenon was revealed. The ship had had large numbers of rats on board, big Norwegian rats, but the cargo of timber had been their undoing. Dozens upon dozens of them had been killed—caught between the boards which made up the cargo, as the boards yawed and squeezed about with the rolling of the ship. The rats had been so squashed that they were only about half an inch thick, and two or three times their normal length and breadth. They were like flat caricatures of some animal known to natural history, and perfectly dry. All the way on that long passage across the world, the ship had been acting as a kind of gigantic rat-trap!

The timber out, we loaded up with the wheat, and one dark night slipped out quietly through Port Phillip Heads and commenced the long beat across the Indian Ocean for South Africa. We slipped out quietly because the ship was overloaded, and

if the Port Authorities had had a good look at her they would have stopped us going. We were several inches below the Plimsoll; it being always the owner's idea to make the ship earn as much as possible.

We hadn't got very far before a sea swept us—not in the ordinary way that a sea might sweep a vessel, but in a heavy, soggy manner that is only too well known to those who have been on an overloaded ship. The vessel rose to it sluggishly, without that lift and buoyancy which she should have had. We thought of the long beat across the Indian Ocean, and shook our heads. It was no sort of thing to look forward to.

The crew refused to carry on. First there was a deputation aft, headed by the Italian whom I have already mentioned as being notorious as a leader of mutinies.

"No can go further, Saar!" he told the Old Man.

"Yes, must go back!" said another.

"All drown' if we go on. Ship no good."

They were standing under the break of the poop. The Old Man and the mate stood just outside the entrance to the saloon. It was late afternoon, with the ship making grotesque shadows on the water, and the wind freshening. I was on the poop with the second mate, looking down at the group. There was a feeling of great tenseness. The Italian had a large silver ear-ring, as big as a bangle, in one ear, and there was a dull gleaming in his eyes. It's funny how in times of stress one notices things; I remember noticing that the Italian's great ear-ring was dirty, and I wondered if he ever got some brasso and polished it.

Then came the Old Man's voice: "You swabs! Get for'rd, the lot of you!"

The words were spoken loudly, but in a peculiarly even tone. The men made no move to obey.

"Get back to Melbin," said one.

The Old Man grunted. "Go back, me foot! See here, I'm master of this ship."

He then stepped up to the Italian. "I'm master, do you hear?"

The Italian stood without moving, his eyes steadily on the Old Man.

I didn't like the fellow, but I must say he had guts. He was unarmed, not having even his sheath-knife on his belt; and he was standing there calmly facing one of the hardest-hitting sailing-ship skippers of the day. It took a bit of doing, because it was very evident that the Old Man was going to "land him one," unless he gave way. It was a case of one man against the other, with the odds all against the Italian, who, like most of his nationality on sailing-ships, was not much good with his fists. Also, a revolver had appeared in the mate's hand, in case the crew should do any rushing tactics and come to the Italian's aid.

In the end it was the Old Man who won.

"I'll show you," he said suddenly. His left fist shot out and then his right, the left connecting solidly on the Italian's jaw, and the right full to the man's solar-plexus. You could hear the sound of the blows plainly above the sound of the sea, the creaking of the gear, and other ship noises. The Italian doubled up, and his friends helped him away.

"Now lay aloft there, you swines, and loose the upper to'gallant'sls!" ordered the Old Man, and retired to his cabin.

With an overloaded ship and in a freshening wind it was no occasion for loosening to'gallant'sls, but rather for taking in sail, and of course the Old Man knew it. But I think he had some idea of drilling it into the crew that, come what may, fair weather or foul, heavy ship or not, he was absolute master. And it worked—though I must say the crew didn't rush loosening the to'gallant'sls, but only did so after holding a meeting in the fo'c'sle to decide whether to mutiny properly or not. I heard later that it was only by a narrow majority that they decided at last against mutiny.

Thus, with an unsatisfactory ship, an unsatisfactory crew, we lay on across the Indian Ocean. Bad weather hit us—a southerly buster—and we had to turn and run north away from it. It was fearful weather, quite bad enough for a well-found ship instead of an overloaded craft like ours. That weather lasted for seven full weeks. Our decks were swept again and again. We lost our boats, the galley, deck fittings. Several times we were "pooped" by seas—that is, seas came swooping down on our decks, over the stern. This is the most dangerous sea that can strike a sailing vessel, or any other vessel perhaps. It was only by a miracle that we escaped foundering.

At least one other ship foundered during that bad weather. She was a four-masted barque that had been in sight of us for some time, battling heavily with the seas. She disappeared one mid-day, and we saw her go. She had been pooped.

It was a ghastly business. At one moment there she was, with her complement of, say, thirty men, right there in sight of us. The next moment she was gone. There was just the last convulsive movements of the top of her main-royal mast as it disappeared beneath the water, and there was not the faintest chance of saving any of the men. Anyway, we hadn't a boat to put over. It was impossible to imagine an engulfing more sudden or complete. It was hard to believe that a ship had been there at all.

For ourselves, we lost one man overboard; it was a marvel that we did not lose more. This chap was swept over by the sea right before my eyes. A moment later I had a glimpse of him—a horrible glimpse—inside the transparent blue slope of a rearing sea. He looked like a great fly caught in blue amber.

CHAPTER II

A FAMOUS CYCLONE

AT last we limped into Port Elizabeth, Algoa Bay, only half a ship. We hadn't a deck fitting left. We might have been through a bombardment by warships. And not only that, but for weeks we had been on short rations—hardly any rations at all, in fact, and had been trying to grind some of the cargo of wheat into a sort of flour for eating. If only because it meant getting a good, square meal, I don't think I've ever been so glad of reaching port in all my life. Sailormen can put up with rough weather, and the dangers arising from it, without a murmur, but when it comes to starving it is another matter. Somebody once said that an army travels on its stomach; sailormen are very much in the same case.

Port Elizabeth wasn't much of a port—wasn't a real port at all; but an open roadstead, where the ships had to lie well out. There were about fifty vessels there at the time, some thirty-five of them being sailing-ships, all lifting to the swell. "Like a great dance, eh?" said one of the other apprentices, who was of an imaginative turn of mind.

But actually it was no time for poetic fancies. We had to repair our damages as best we could, and with the ship constantly rolling it was no easy job. Also, the materials we had to do it with didn't make it easier. They were planks cast overboard

from a horse-ship anchored inshore of us. The horses had been landed, and the planks were the timbers with which the horse-boxes had been made. The boxes, now of no use, had been taken to pieces and the planks thrown overboard. With characteristic meanness, the Old Man ordered us out, in borrowed boats, to collect these planks and use them for the repairs.

I suppose by this procedure he saved the ship quite a bit of money, for timber ashore was anything but cheap; but it was altogether a tough business. One of the other apprentices and myself nearly lost our lives over it.

We were out in a ship's whale-boat, obtained from one of the other vessels, engaged in gathering the planks, when the wind changed suddenly and came off the shore and blew us out to sea. The boat was far too big for two youths to manage properly, and though we rowed hard we could make no progress against the wind, but just kept on being blown farther and farther out to sea. It was near sundown when this happened, and no one had noticed us. In fact, it was not till well after dark, when it was found that we hadn't returned to the ship, that we were missed.

We hadn't any food, water, or anything else. We were just two young English boys, adrift in the windswept darkness in an empty boat that was far too big for us, heading straight for the wastes of the South Atlantic. I had the wind-up, terribly, but the other lad, who was a couple of years older than me, tried to make a joke of it, and thereby cheer me up.

"I say, won't the Old Man give us hell when

we get back!" The wind was blowing the words away, and the spray cutting across his face. "He'll say we brought the boat out here on purpose; he's like that! Oh, we'll get choked off all right!"

This subtle insistence on the fact that we were going to get safely back was certainly cheering. If this older lad was so sure that we were going to get back, then I supposed it would be so. I even began to picture the Old Man giving us our "choking off." That fellow-apprentice of mine was a good lad, and it was there that night in that time of great distress, that he showed his quality. In after life he became commander of a crack Atlantic liner; he also did very good work against the German submarine terror in the Great War.

We drifted all night, and it was not till the middle of the following morning that we were found by a steam tug which had come out to search for us. We were just about all-in, but that didn't prevent our Old Man giving us hell as soon as we were safely back on our ship once more.

He said that we were a pair of something something fools for not having come aboard the minute the wind changed and came off the land. He said we'd never make sailors, and of all the stupid something apprentices he'd ever known, we were the something worst. So weak were we that we could hardly stand as we listened to this harangue, but our condition seemed to make no impression on the Old Man.

"Dammit!" he roared. "Don't you realize that if you'd been lost I would have had to make good that boat to the ship I borrowed it from?"

He was the most pitiless man I have ever known.

Day after day we worked at the repairs, all hands and the cook, together with the assistance of a shore carpenter or two.

The great swell never for a moment let up. One of the ships nearby us had a nasty accident because of it. She was unloading machinery into a barge alongside. One of these pieces of machinery was an enormous fly-wheel, many tons in weight. Getting heavy stuff like that into a barge was a very ticklish job. You had to see that the barge was not just about to rise suddenly on the swell as the piece of heavy machinery was reaching her. A slight miscalculation in this way could easily mean the piece of machinery going through the bottom of the barge.

That is what happened on this occasion. The great fly-wheel had only another three or four feet to go, and was still being lowered, when the barge suddenly lifted on the swell, a matter of ten or fifteen feet, straight up. The fly-wheel crashed down, straight through her, ripping out her bottom and smashing to pulp the head of a Kaffir stevedore. The barge promptly sank, throwing the Kaffir crew, shouting and screaming, into the water, while the great fly-wheel, hanging on its steel fall, swung this way and that. One of its lunges brought it smack-ing hard against the side of the ship, where it killed another Kaffir who was trying to scramble up on board.

Altogether that affair cost four lives. Among the people of the barge was a Kaffir woman and her child, neither of whom could swim, and they were drowned.

There was another mishap that occurred in a

ship near us, though this had nothing to do with the swell.

This ship had two anchors down and was heaving up the first of them, preparatory to sailing, having discharged her cargo. She was a big lump of a craft, a four-masted barque, one of the old school; something like our own craft, with no steam gear or anything of that sort for getting the anchor up, but just the old-fashioned capstan windlass on the fo'csle head. The chain was a big one, several pounds to the link, and as it came clanking up, a man down in the chain-locker saw to it that it lay out smoothly, so that next time they anchored it would run out easily without kinks. The chain-locker was a small place, and the man had to stand on the pile of chain.

All went well till the anchor was aweigh. Then suddenly a pawl in the windlass carried away. With the full weight of the anchor upon it, the windlass reversed. The men at the capstan-bars on the fo'csle were sent sprawling, two of them over the side. The mate, who was in charge of the operations, had his leg broken.

But all that was nothing to what happened to the man in the chain-locker. The chain, leaping and rushing as it tore back through the hawse-pipe, took the man with it—and the hawse-pipe was only just large enough for the chain. There were bits of the luckless fellow squashed along the chain for fathoms. I have known this sort of thing to happen more than once during my travels.

The great disaster of our stay in Algoa Bay, however, was the hurricane. The Algoa Bay hurricane is one of the most famous in the annals

of shipping, and if you go to the Bay to-day you will still see remains of the large number of ships that were cast ashore there during those terrible two days. Out of the thirty-five sailing-ships I have mentioned as lying at anchor in the bay, thirty were driven ashore; some one on top of the other. Ours was one of the five that escaped. The loss of life was tremendous.

I shall never forget the experience.

Storm warnings had been given out some time before, and the ships had got ready all the anchors they had. Our Old Man was ashore when the word came through that the storm was approaching; like most of the other sailing-ship skippers, he spent as much time ashore as he could. Incidentally, the hotel, or club, that the skippers commonly frequented on the water-front at Port Elizabeth, had a large telescope by which they could see what was going on in their ships. Thus, if the mate of a vessel thought that he might have a bit of an easy time while the Old Man was ashore, he would be certain to hear all about it when the Old Man came on board again. "I saw you, Mister!" the Old Man would snarl. "Taking things easy—eh? No work doing! When the cat's away the mice will play—eh?" And the mate would ask himself how the hell the Old Man knew, the ship being perhaps three miles off the shore.

On this present occasion our Old Man came hurrying on board. "We're in for it, Mister!" I heard him say to one of the mates. "It's going to be a matter of hanging on."

He disappeared below and presently came up



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THE AUTHOR IN CIVILIZED COUNTRY BEFORE GOING
NORTH

Uniform and equipment of Constable in R.N.W.M. Police
[see page 173]

in oilskins and sou'wester, though as yet there was neither wind nor rain. The great swell still rolled steadily in from seaward, but it had a nasty, oily look. There was a closeness in the atmosphere—a sort of tension. I saw one of the crew staring seaward with a scared expression on his face. His fingers were busy with a rosary round his neck. Somehow, this impressed me more than any other feature of the coming storm. I said to myself: "If that hard-case seaman wants to pray, then it *must* be bad."

Then suddenly—smack! The wind was upon us. The ship heeled and a big lump of a sea came lifting on board. All round us the ships were heeling and big lumps of seas coming on board. They yawed this way and that as they swung to their anchors to face the wind. No ship had less than three anchors down, and many had five. It was only mid-afternoon, but there was a queer kind of darkness coming up over the sea. It was exactly as if the wind had blown it up.

Presently we saw sheets of roofing-iron go flying off houses ashore. After the storm, some of those sheets of iron were found wrapped round trees as though they'd been sheets of paper. In one place one of them had struck a tall chimney edge-on and felled it clean.

We dropped our fifth and last anchor, attached to the towing hawser. There was no chance of getting up sail and clearing out. It was a dead lee shore. That is, the wind blew from the sea directly on to the shore. By sundown the wind was carrying away things aloft, blocks and other gear. The masts quivered and bent. Right through the

night it howled like that. It was all hands on duty all the time. No one knew what was going to happen. Our greatest anxiety was that the anchors would drag or the cables carry away. God, how we watched those cables! Talk about having your life hanging by a thread! That's all that those chains and cables seemed to us—mere threads!

Daylight showed that one of the other ships had been driven ashore. With a glass, I could make her out quite clearly, her hull battered by the tremendous surf. Now and again she would be lifted up and brought down with a crash on the sand. One of her masts was gone completely, and the other two were merely stumps. As I watched, a tremendous roller came down fairly and squarely on her main-deck. There must have been thousands of tons of water, and it stove the deck in—or perhaps I should say, burst it in. Planks went flying. We learnt afterwards that only seven of her crew of twenty-eight escaped.

Hour after hour we hung on there, each minute feeling that the next minute we would be dragging ashore. It was a horrible mental strain. You felt you couldn't endure the anxiety any longer. I heard a man curse the sea—letting himself go, as though he were cursing a terrible human enemy. It was nerves that made him behave so—just the awful tension and uncertainty—rather than fear.

Never for a moment did the wind let up. Instead, it grew harder as the time went on. One after another the ships dragged their anchors or their cables parted, and they were driven ashore, in every case with loss of life. Several times these

drifting ships almost collided with us as they dragged past. That would have been the end of us, of course. It was as much as our anchors could do to hold our ship, without having another one to support, as it were. How we escaped, I don't know. Thirty is a very large number of ships to have dragged their anchors in one roadstead. Sometimes we saw the faces of the men on the doomed ships as they drifted past through the spray. Poor, helpless fellow-sailormen! If only we could have helped them! There they were, clinging to the fife-rails, or getting what pitiful shelter they could under the break of the forecastle. On more than one there was a woman—the Captain's wife. Poor, wind-swept, drenched figures! Out of the spume and drift they showed for a second or two, and then were gone. They and their ships were indeed like ghosts.

Right on through that terrible storm we hung on, though how we managed it, God only knows. Much better-found ships than ours went ashore. So strong was that hurricane that the steamships in the roadstead only saved themselves from being driven ashore by steaming full-speed up to their anchors, or putting to sea.

At last, after two days of this terrible devastation, the wind went down, and we saw that the shore was a litter of wrecks. I doubt if there has ever been anything like it on any shore anywhere. Dotted along the curve of the bay were those thirty big ships. Some had been carried high up on to the land, others were smashed to pieces. Some had crashed one on top of the other, so that they were three-deep! Bodies were everywhere: floating

about in the inshore water, thrown right up on the land, jammed in and about the wrecks.

A lot of damage had been done to the town of Port Elizabeth, and casualties there were numerous. But I remember that I was much more interested in the broken ships and the dead sailormen than I was in what had happened to the shore-folk. I couldn't understand why all those fine ships should have been driven ashore, and our old tub have been one of the very few that escaped. It was like some sort of grim jest on the part of Fate.

CHAPTER III

A ROUNDABOUT AND OTHER THINGS

AFTER a couple of years of roughing it in the old *Colonia*, I was transferred to a small barque called the *Dee*. She was just about the complete opposite of the other ship. She had teak cabins, the food was splendid, and the officers were all old steamboat men. The Captain was a fine-looking old chap, with a long beard carefully divided in the centre, so that you could almost have tied the two ends at the back of his head. When he went ashore, it was in a frock-coat and a hat that was half a bowler and half a topper. He looked enormously dignified, and yet was full of kindly understanding. After the *Colonia* I looked upon this ship as a sort of heaven. I finished the term of my apprenticeship in her.

I didn't conclude my apprenticeship, however, without a touch of the rough stuff.

This was at the port of Bunbury, West Australia, where we had gone to load jarrah timber. There were a lot of Russian Finns belonging to other ships in the port, and for some reason they had a grouch against us Britishers. One night when the Old Man was ashore a crowd set upon him. For all his good nature, the Old Man was pretty clever with his fists, and he gave a very fair account of himself. But he had no chance against a gang like that, and the end came when one of them laid him out

with a weapon which was nothing more than a number of iron bolt-nuts strung on a piece of rope, like a necklace. With this beastly weapon one of the damned Finns, coming behind the Captain, laid open the back of his head. It was a fearful wound, and the Old Man was confined to hospital for weeks.

An attack like that, of course, was more than we fellows could stand, and as soon as we heard of it we went ashore and found those Finns. A pitched battle resulted. There were about thirty of the Finns, and thirty of us Britishers. The police were helpless; or perhaps I should say that when they tried to interfere, it was in order to help us against the Finns. No one had any sympathy for people who could attack a harmless old gentleman in the way they had done.

Anything was used as a weapon—belaying pins, sticks, stones, bottles, and many a head was split open that night. Some of the fighting took place on the pier, and fighters toppled over into the water. Many of the buildings about the town end of the pier had their windows smashed by missiles. I myself finished up with a black eye and various cuts about the face, to say nothing of numerous lumps and bruises on the body. But I know I gave as good as I got—yes, and a bit more! At least two of the Finns fell to good stiff lefts of mine.

It was altogether a wild, mad riot, and it was a wonder that no one was killed. Perhaps there would have been plenty killed if the police, aided by numbers of the townspeople, had not at last succeeded in interfering and putting an end to it. It was Bunbury's great night. The old hands still talk about it, I'm told.

At Bunbury the term of my apprenticeship expired, and there I left the ship. I was getting a bit tired of the sea, and I thought I would like a spell of shore life for a while. I went inland from Bunbury and got a job boundary-riding on a sheep-station. My job was to ride on horseback round the fences, miles upon miles of them, and see that they were in order.

It was exciting work. Once, in the dusk, as I got off my horse at the end of a day's ride, I stepped fairly and squarely on to a snake! Not one of those little bits of snakes that you find in England occasionally, but a proper snake, a fathom and a-half long at least, and thicker than my wrist. The horse snorted and bolted, and I would have bolted, too, if I could. But somehow I couldn't. I was stiff with horror. I thought that if I jumped, the snake would strike me. I thought that if I didn't jump he would strike me just the same. I was between a sweat and a shiver. I could feel the reptile give a sort of quick wriggle as my foot touched him; and it's hard to imagine anything more horrible than that same wriggle. All this took place in the fraction of a second, yet in such cases you don't measure things in terms of time, but by the crowded rushing thoughts that you think. By such measurement, at any rate, I was an æon standing there on that snake! I leapt at last, and gave a yell as I did so. I sprang as far as ever I could, in the longest standing jump I ever made in my life. And when I looked round for the snake, it was only to see the end of his tail disappearing among some bushes! I think he had been as surprised and scared as I was. The shock of it all

so upset me that I was very nearly sick right there on the spot.

There was another snake experience while I was on that sheep-station, though this time it didn't actually happen to me but to one of the other boundary-riders who shared my hut at headquarters.

I had gone to my bunk early, and about eleven o'clock was awakened from sound sleep by a yell from the other fellow. He was a young man, lean and hatchet-faced (as so many Australians are—in fact, I think they are developing a new racial type down there in their great island continent), and he was shouting:

"A snake! Right in me bloody bed!"

I sat up, startled and blinking. "Eh, what! Whose bed?"

"Mine! I was just getting in and me foot touched him. Where's the matches?"

The other lit the lamp; a tin of fat with an inch or two of moleskin cut from an old pair of trousers stuck in it for a wick, and known as a "slush-lamp."

"He's coiled up under the blanket! There—keep quiet—you can see him!"

In spite of the dimness and flicker of the light, I could make out the shape of the coils under the blanket. He certainly was a big fellow. I remember thinking: "God, it might have been *my* bed!" and going cold all over at the thought.

"'Struth, what a thing to happen to a man!" said my companion. "Here I was, just getting into bed, after dousing the glim, and feeling comfortable and all, and then—and then me foot touched him."

He was trembling, and the words were rushing from him in a kind of half-whisper.

"Keep your eyes on him, will you?" he went on, "while I get something to dong him one. A snake in me bed—blimey!"

He ran outside, and I got quietly and quickly out of my bed. Bed was no place to be in when there was a large snake in the hut. I got away as far as I could from that other bed, with its coiled horror under the blanket.

I looked round for something with which to assist my companion in the "donging" process, and my eye fell on a shot-gun that I sometimes carried on my rounds. A shot-gun is a very good weapon against a snake. I reached for it, and was just inserting a cartridge when my companion returned.

He had an axe in his hand. Motioning me to silence, he tiptoed over to the bed, swung the axe high (incidentally in doing so breaking a framed photograph of his best girl that hung on the wall) and brought it hard down on that coiled mass under the blanket.

"Take that!" he cried; "and that! And that!" He brought the axe down repeatedly.

It was a queer scene in the dim light of the slush lamp. The man with the axe was like a vengeful demon. Sweat poured down his face.

"You swine—coming into a man's bed!" he cried. Then, to me: "That ought to fix him! But you might as well give him a shot out of your gun and finish him off. Go on; never mind the blankets."

I had found a cartridge, and slipped it into the gun. My companion stood aside, and I fired,

straight into the bed at point-blank range. The noise of the explosion in the galvanized iron-roofed hut was tremendous. The air was thick with the smoke of the powder, and the smell of it mingling with the smell of the slush lamp produced an indescribable odour. The noise of the shot was heard all over the station, there were cries of: "What the hell's up?" and people came running.

Then, as the smoke cleared away and further lights were brought, we examined the bed and found that the "snake" was merely a coiled-up stock-whip that some practical joker had placed in the bed!

It was an expensive "joke," for the blankets were all cut and shot about, and the stock-whip chopped into pieces. Moreover, my companion got hold of the practical joker next day, and a fight of such severity followed that they were both laid up for days afterwards with injuries.

One day, on my boundary rounds, I encountered a swagman. A swagman in Australia is one who wanders about the country, either just tramping or seeking employment, with all his possessions rolled in a blanket strapped on his back and in his hand a well-blackened billy-can for making tea.

This fellow hailed me and asked if I had any tobacco. I gave him a piece—it was all plug tobacco there—and we sat down and had a yarn. He was a gaunt person, very sunburned, very wrinkled about the corner of the eyes, and wearing an old felt hat which had corks on strings hanging down from the brim to keep off the flies from his face. Western Australia is the home of flies. With every movement of the man's head the corks

swayed and bobbed up and down. I remember thinking that having things swaying and bobbing before one's face all the time was enough to send a man mad.

It certainly seemed to me that my companion wasn't quite sane. He said he was known as the "Swagman Poet." He'd been writing poems for years, he said, and many of them had been published in the *Sydney Bulletin*. He produced some of his work, which had been printed surely enough, and read extracts to me. His efforts were all about horses and gum-trees, and open-air things like that, and weren't half bad—though when it comes to poetry I don't suppose I am much of a critic. But I do know that some of those lines stayed in my mind for quite a while afterwards; they had a kind of jingle that just fitted the canter of my horse as I rode on my rounds.

My swagman was undoubtedly a queer fellow. He was not only a poet, but he had a great scheme for making a lot of money out of a gold-reef he knew about near Kalgoorlie; for which place, some hundreds of miles away to the north, he said he was making. He told me a long and involved story about how he had found the reef a year before, but had met with an accident with blasting dynamite and been compelled to come south to Perth to recover. Then, when he was well again, he hadn't any money for the fare back to the gold-fields. He was now tramping round looking for a job by which he could earn it, the necessary sum, and if he couldn't earn it he was going to tramp all the way back.

He then produced some small pieces of quartz

with specks of gold in them, and said they came from the reef. And, after talking about how wonderfully rich the reef was, he asked me would I like to take a share in it in return for helping him with the fare. He didn't want to waste time looking for jobs while all that wealth was waiting for him up there, he said. I laughed and said: "Not on your life!" I wasn't to be taken in as easily as all that! Whereupon the swagman put away his poems and his bits of quartz and frowned. "Orright, you flaming pommie!" he snarled. The word "pommie," I should explain, is a corruption of the word immigrant—immigrant, pomegranate, pommie—and is applied to most newly-arrived English in Australia. The swagman had, of course, been quick to notice my English English as opposed to Australian English. At any rate, hoisting his swag on his back and picking up his blackened billy-can, my prospective mining partner accepted my refusal and tramped off in indignation.

But that story about the gold-reef proved to be quite true. A couple of years later I heard about it in a letter from a friend. The swagman poet had managed to get back to Kalgoorlie, and had got to work on his reef. He made a fortune, I believe. I don't know whether he went on writing poetry afterwards. If he didn't, I feel it was a great pity. But, oh, what a chance I missed in not accepting his offer! I had a few pounds saved up and could easily have accommodated him with the fare.

My boundary-riding job petered out a little later, and I had to scratch round and look for another job. In the months that followed I engaged

in various occupations. One was that of a kind of handyman in a jarrah timber camp. Together with two other chaps, I very nearly lost my life there, in most peculiar circumstances.

The three of us had been loading jarrah logs on to a flat truck on a light railway some two miles from the camp. A locomotive had brought us the empty truck, and then gone off. The spot where we were was at the top of a long slope, and the idea was that when the truck was loaded we would board it and run it back down the slope to the camp by the force of gravity. We had done this several times without accident, and quite looked forward to the run as we climbed up on to the truck, released the brakes and let it go. It was fine to be careering down through the tall timber in this way, in the cool of the evening, all of us with our hats off and the wind blowing through our hair. There was something very invigorating about it.

For about a mile we went on like this, then we saw ahead of us some cows straying across the rails—and at the same time discovered that the brake was not working! We were going at umpteen miles an hour. “Hi, there!” we yelled, frantically, trying to scare the cows away. “Out of the road there, blast you!” roared one chap, exactly as if he expected the cows to understand the actual words. The next moment we were right on to the beasts. I jumped, and at the same instant the truck, smashing into one of the cows, left the rails, capsized and spilled the logs. One of them came jumping after me. It was a straight tree-trunk, thirty feet long at least. Scraps of flying

bark went down my neck, and I felt the ground shake beneath the log's bouncing progress.

As I rolled on down the slope the runaway tree-trunk rolled after me. You could have sworn the thing was alive. I got to my knees, then to my feet, and tried to run, but stumbled and fell. I scrambled and crawled, desperately. The great log came rolling on and on. It was like a juggernaut pursuing a victim. If I scrambled to the right or left, it turned to the right or left also. And this didn't go on for just a yard or two, but for a full seventy or eighty yards! Eighty yards of being pursued by a tree-trunk that would have rolled me flat! . . . I just can't say how grateful I was when at last the log hit a stump and slewed off in another direction at last.

I crawled weakly to my feet, and for some moments stood leaning against a tree, spitting the dirt from my mouth and wiping away the sweat from my face and eyes, and feeling queerly cold all over. Then I went back to the scene of the accident. Things were in a dreadful mess. One of my mates had his leg broken by one of the logs. Another had had a log roll over him; but fortunately he had fallen into a depression in the ground, and the log had inflicted only minor injuries, although these were very numerous. As for the cow that had been hit, she had been both disembowled and crushed by the collision with the truck.

Another job I had was managing a roundabout at an annual fair at Bunbury.

It was a very crude roundabout, driven by a belt from a steam-engine standing some distance

from the roundabout itself. The fair season was a time of great festivity, and drunken farmers and others were constantly falling over the belt from the engine and putting a temporary stop to the proceedings. Also, the belt often used to break, or slip off the flywheel, and thereby cause further halts. Naturally, such shortcomings were greatly to the annoyance of the riders, who complained of getting very short rides for their money, and grew most sarcastic about the whole affair. The amount of sarcasm of which a roundabout-riding farmer could be capable was surprising! It naturally led to quite a few fights between the management and their customers.

Another difficulty of that roundabout was the musical apparatus. Originally it could play two tunes—"The Belle of New York" and "For Old Times' Sake." (It played them very badly, I might mention.) The tunes came off perforated paper rolls, but the "Belle of New York" was so severely damaged that, though I gummed it together with sticky paper, and added new perforations where I thought they were necessary, the general effect was so bad that it didn't sound like "The Belle of New York" or anything on earth. In consequence, we had to scrap it and make do with "For Old Times' Sake."

However, the strain of having to do the work of two tunes was too much for "For Old Times' Sake," and after the verses had worn out we were reduced to only a portion of the chorus. How we played that fragment of chorus over and over again, from early in the morning when the fair opened till late at night when it closed! People complained

—most of them in highly vigorous and unmistakable terms—and in the end the police asked me to stop the maddening tune. Thereafter, quite as much to my own relief as everyone else's, the roundabout was a silent one.

At this fair I had a curious experience with a fortune-teller. I don't think I am unduly superstitious, or a great believer in fortune-telling and so on, but I must say that this experience was impressive.

The fortune-teller was an Indian, who made a living of sorts by travelling round the country and visiting fairs with a one-horse van from which he sold drapery and clothing. He was an old man who had been many years in Australia, and he wore a most neatly-folded turban. Needing some studs one evening, I went to him at his van, which was near the roundabout. Business happened to be rather quiet at the moment, and we got to talking. We had both travelled considerably, and had that interest in common. He told me he was a Yogi and had practised occultism a great deal. I rather liked the old chap, and when presently he offered to tell my fortune, I said: "All right! Go ahead!"

I thought it would be just the ordinary "cross my hand with silver" bunk; but presently I sat up and listened. To my astonishment, this man was telling me extraordinarily true things about my past. He described how I had fallen overboard from the old *Colonia* and been pursued by a shark, and pictured some of my experiences in the Algoa Bay cyclone—various things like that. These incidents, of course, he might possibly—though it

was exceedingly unlikely—have heard from old shipmates of mine whom he had chanced to meet somewhere. But presently he went further. He described incidents in my early life that I am dead certain no one outside my own home circle knew anything about. He told me things about myself that only I knew anything about.

In the end I was greatly impressed, and said so. I asked the Indian how he did it. But he merely shook his wise old head, smiled, and made predictions of my future—predictions which came astonishingly true. He told me of strange experiences I would have in ships, of skulls that came to life, of my seeing my own grave. . . . Strange things indeed. I did not know whether to be glad or sorry when the man stopped.

CHAPTER IV

A WERWOLF

IT was not long before I was at sea again. With my restless nature I was tired of Western Australia, and wanted the sight of new places and new people; no man ever believed more devoutly than I, that variety was the spice of life. I was finished with sail now, however, and went to sea in steam, and at length found myself fourth officer in a 5,000-ton ship, plying between Southampton and South America. After so long in sail, with its discomforts, there was almost a feeling of luxury in working in a passenger steamer. The food was better, the hours of duty were much fewer, and there were none of those long, dreary passages between ports so common in windjammers.

The Captain was an exceedingly fine man, and it was because of this that on that ship I had one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. With Mr. W——, a senior officer, I was on the bridge, where the Captain's room was situated. The door was slightly open, and we could see a bottle of cocktails on the table. Some glasses stood near by. We looked at one another. The room was empty.

"What say?" said my companion. "Shall we?"

He went to the door, pushed it open, and entered. The temptation was great, and I followed. The bottle was nearly full, and it seemed we could

have a little drink apiece without making any appreciable difference to it. "Right ho!" I said, and we poured out a small cocktail each. I admit I was rather nervous about it, and was all for swallowing the drink down and getting out quickly.

But just as we raised our glasses there came a voice from the doorway behind us.

"Make it three, will you?"

We almost dropped our glasses as we saw the Captain himself standing there.

But we need not have been alarmed.

"I forgot my spectacles and came back to get them," the Captain said in a most conversational way, as though there was nothing in the least the matter. With shaking fingers W—— poured out a third glass and handed it to him.

"Well, here's luck, gentlemen," said the Captain, with a courteous bow, and we drank; though I must say I've never had so much trouble in getting a drink down in all my life.

And with that the Captain picked up his spectacles and went out. We never heard another word about the matter. The effect on that other officer and myself was that we conceived so great an affection and admiration for that Captain that we would have died for him.

My next voyage, to the West Indies, was a most unfortunate one. Many a time during those unlucky days did I think of the words of the Indian fortune-teller about my having strange experiences in ships. Bad luck! I've never since experienced the like of it. There were five parsons on board, and parsons are said to bring bad luck to a ship.

Still, most deep-sea ships have parsons on board every voyage.

Anyway, it wasn't long before things began to happen. Four days out from Southampton a half-bred West Indian deck passenger went mad. I saw it happen from the bridge. There were quite a number of deck-passengers—coloured people of various nationalities—sitting around smoking and yarning or dozing in the sun. Suddenly I noticed this half-breed fellow was behaving very strangely.

He'd been sitting by himself, but now he had got down on his hands and knees and was crawling towards a little party of three or four others who had their backs to him. At first I thought it was some sort of a game he was playing, or perhaps trying to amuse some children near by. Then I saw it was certainly no game. The fellow's face was all screwed up and working horribly. There was a queer wetness about his lips. His eyes were rolling and sort of twisted.

The next moment the West Indian had produced a sheath-knife. It was brand-new, and gave a quick glisten in the sun. He was almost upon the nearest of the men who had their backs to him, when I gave a shout. "Look out, there! Look out!" I bellowed, with all the strength of my lungs.

My shout was just in time. The attention of the other deck-passengers was drawn to the half-breed, and about a dozen of them rushed and fell on him. It was a fine old mix-up, for the fellow was strong, and each of the men who rushed him was trying his best to avoid being cut by the knife. The madman lunged and thrust with it. Some of the men who rushed him put up a very fine display

of side-stepping and dodging generally. But at last someone got the knife away from him, and then it was merely a matter of holding him down till he could be properly secured.

The only place that would serve as a cell was the bosun's locker—a kind of tiny cabin—and here at length the madman was placed for security. The idea was to keep him there till we reached the next port, when he would be handed over to the shore authorities.

The prisoner's form of insanity was a peculiar one. He imagined he was some kind of wild animal—a tiger or lion. This accounted for the way he had crept on his hands and knees, and from the moment he was secured he hardly ceased to growl or snarl after the fashion of an animal. His case greatly interested one of our passengers, who was an anthropologist. He said it was one of the few cases of the idea of the *werwolf* really happening. I believe articles on the case appeared later in scientific journals.

The man, however, never reached port. When the door of the bosun's locker was opened so that food could be introduced, another shock awaited us. The unfortunate half-breed had taken off all his clothes and covered his body with ship's paint which he had found in the locker. He had put the paint on mostly in stripes—white stripes on a brown and red background. He might have been some awful kind of tiger.

The paint was in his eyes and hair. He had been eating it, and it leaked from the corners of his mouth. Some of the paint that leaked out in this way was red, and looked horribly like blood.

The awful tiger might just have made an awful meal.

The madman gave a snarl as the locker door was opened. But he was near the end of things; the paint had poisoned him. He staggered forward weakly, and fell. A few hours later, in spite of all the doctor's efforts, he was dead. We buried him at sea. Poor devil!

The next mishap that occurred was that I was bitten by a dog. I have heard that, in defining what is and what is not news, journalists say that it isn't news if a dog bites a man, but only if a man bites a dog. I'm not a journalist, but I do know that getting bitten by a dog holds one's attention very completely. Especially if he is bitten as I was. The dog in the present instance was a large Dalmatian, and I didn't know he was there. Hitherto, the animal, with a number of others of his kind, had been kept chained on the forward-deck, but during my watch below they had all been taken aft.

The first I knew of the change was when, in the darkness of one o'clock in the morning, I was making my rounds, and stumbled on to the animals. The large Dalmatian fastened on to my leg and hung on, ripping the flesh through my trousers. I had come well within the length of his chain, and he was able to give me the full strength of his jaws. I never knew before what great power a dog had in his bite.

I kicked, shouted and punched. It's a queer feeling, punching a dog, especially in the darkness. It was sort of uncanny. And it wasn't as if the animal were normally ferocious; it was just that

he was startled by my stumbling upon him in the darkness. Somehow that seemed to make it worse. I'd often petted him and given him biscuits and things, and we were very good friends.

I don't know how long the fight went on, but I do know that if help hadn't come when it did things would have gone very badly indeed for me. In the course of the struggle I had stumbled and fallen, and in another moment the dog might have been at my throat. I was certainly rescued just in time. I was laid up for over a month with the wound.

Next, at Jamaica, one of the ships of our own line collided with us, smashing away rails, boats, deck-fittings and what not. How it happened no one seemed to know. There were all sorts of rumoured explanations, ranging from wrong orders being given to that of magnetic attraction between the two ships. Some of the alleged explanations were fantastic. An old shell-back member of the crew, who had been at sea more than twice the number of years that I was of age, told me most solemnly that the sea was not just a quantity of water, but a living thing that had its likes and dislikes—a wide, deep monster that only allowed ships to go travelling about its breast on sufferance! "If it gets a set on ye that's the end o' ye," the wiseacre solemnly declared. "Ye want to keep in its good graces. The difficulty is to know how to do it. It's sairtainly very difficult to know how to do it."

When the ship was finally repaired, we went on to Puerto Colombia in Savanilla. It was a place that fascinated me, because it was the port from

which one started in order to go to Bogota, the far interior capital of Colombia. The journey to Bogota is up the river Magdalena, and occupies several weeks of jungles, cataracts, queer natives, and all the adventures that go with such conditions. I would have loved to make that journey, not with any special idea of gain, but just for the journey's sake. If it hadn't been that I was laid up with the dog-bite, maybe I would have obtained leave of absence from the ship for a voyage and attempted the trip to Bogota. It would, of course, have been most impractical, and all that sort of thing, but then that's just the sort of person I am. The journey to Bogota is one of the most difficult and interesting river journeys in the world, and perhaps I shall still make it some day.

Actually, however, if it was excitement I wanted, there was plenty there at Puerta Colombia.

Our arrival was dramatic, to say the least of it. The pier was a long one, and at the end was a kind of office occupied by the pier-master, an American named Captain Dix. We went to lie alongside in the ordinary way, and when the manœuvre was nearly finished the usual signal "full astern" was rung on the engine-room telegraph.

But the order was not executed. It was said afterwards that the jamming of the reversing gear was responsible. However that may be, instead of the engines being put astern, the ship carried her speed. She cut into the stern of a German vessel lying ahead of us along the pier, and, having sent her adrift, slewed, and drove clean through the pier itself. She left the pier-master's officer on the

end isolated like an island. Captain Dix came rushing out throwing up his hands and shouting: "Hey, you gol-darned bunch of stiffs, what the hell new kind of game do you think you're playing? . . ."

Numbers of coloured folk were flung into the water with the wreck of the pier. There was one fat-faced fellow in spectacles, I remember, who clung to a splintered plank and kept on shouting out: "Yah, yah, yah, yah—" If ever there was an instance of a man expressing incoherent surprise, it was then. The whole thing was very serious, of course; but it was hard not to laugh. Two or three others were plunged right under by the suddenness of the affair, and came up spitting out mouthfuls of water. Some shouted obscenely up at us, cursing us for Britishers. One man shouted very loudly in broken English that as soon as he got ashore he would tell the police!

Meanwhile, there were the Germans making a fuss about their ship having been struck, and Captain Dix throwing up his hands and getting more and more expressive. The whole thing was really a fine old mess, and it was a long time indeed before the pier was made shipshape again. I never heard rightly who paid for the damage, the insurance people or the shipping company; but I do know that it must have come to a fair amount.

At our next port of call, Colon, there was another pier accident. A section of the pier suddenly gave way, through being overloaded with a cargo of cement.

The collapse took place right alongside of us. It was one of those absolutely quiet nights that

you often get in the tropics. The only sounds were notes of a mouth-organ played by some native upon the pier, and an occasional barking of a dog up in the town. The ship's port-holes were all open. On the promenade deck some passengers lounged about; amongst them were several ladies, in spotless white. One of the women was a girl of about nineteen, the daughter of a sugar-planter in the Barbados, and on whom I was a bit struck. My leg was well on the mend now, and, being able to walk without difficulty, I was on my way to the promenade deck to see what chance there was of having a quiet little talk with the young lady of my heart.

A moment later there came a queer creak from the pier. In the quiet of the night it sounded with remarkable clearness. Then there came another creak, then a shout from a pier-watchman. A sound of rending timber followed, a smashing and crashing and splashing, and that portion of the pier which supported the cement crumpled up and collapsed; all so suddenly that we thought a seaquake or earthquake must have been responsible.

The barrels of cement burst, and clouds of cement filled the air. It came in through the port-holes, and made a horrible mess of the cabins. It filled our eyes and noses and ears. It was like being in a sandstorm. Our spruce ship in no time became a dust-covered, shabby-looking old tramp. While, as for the ladies in spotless white, they were turned into grimy creatures of dirty grey.

When at last all the confusion had died down, my young lady from the Barbados and I looked at one another and roared with laughter. It's hard

to be romantic when you're covered all over with cement; but luckily we were able to laugh. It was, of course, no laughing matter for the owners of the cement, and of the pier.

There was another strange pier accident when we were at Colon; though, thank goodness, it was an accident which, for once, had nothing to do with us. It was at one of the other piers, and the ship concerned was a big Spanish mail-boat.

The Spanish craft was just arriving, and was coming slowly to a stop, when by a stupid mistake the officer on the bridge rang the engines to "full speed ahead" instead of astern. The great ship plunged forward, scraping along the pier. Great excitement at once prevailed on board, and the Captain ordered the anchor to be dropped. He meant, of course, the anchor on the side of the ship's bow next the water. But the officer on the forecastle head lost his nerve, and let go the anchor that was next the pier!

The anchor, a big, old-fashioned one with enormous flukes and a heavy stock, dropped on to the pier and went dragging along. It hooked into and uprooted a length of pier railway, and picked up some trucks. It caught in a crane, and brought it crashing down. It grappled up bales of cargo, knocked over heaped-up cases of general cargo, tipped a watchman's hut over into the water. It was just a great drag, picking up all and sundry, with all the strength of a 10,000 ton steamship going full speed ahead to give it power. The amount of damage done before at length the ship was stopped was remarkable, but somehow it was the variety of the damage that astonished one most.

CHAPTER V

"ME GO DIE"

SOME time after this I became Second Officer in a 6,000-ton cargo ship belonging to the American and Oriental Steamship Co., and we ran a freight of big-gun ammunition from New York to Cavite, in the Phillipines. On the way fire broke out in the bunkers, and one of the worst fortnights of my life followed.

Do what we could, we couldn't get that fire out. The deck-plates grew red-hot. Never for one second was the thought of that ammunition out of our minds. Fire at sea is bad enough at any time, but when you are loaded up with explosives—well, you can just imagine it! The fire was actually all round the magazine. I'll swear that no man on that ship for the full two weeks had a proper sleep. It's hard to drop comfortably off to sleep when one never knows but what at any moment you may be blown sky-high! We thought and talked fire; it was the only topic of conversation. The crowd forward were a pretty tough lot, but I wouldn't have been surprised to hear that many of them said their prayers before turning in.

Day after day we made our way along in this horribly uncomfortable manner. We were as much fire-fighters as seamen—more so, in fact. We used up all the fire extinguishers on board, and the fire-hoses never ceased to play. There was a smell of

hot iron everywhere from the sizzling plates of the deck, and you could see a nasty heat haze rising from the deck. Owing to the fire being all round the magazine, we couldn't reach the ammunition in order to get it out and dump it over the side.

Towards the end the strain became so great that I know I, for one, decided: "Well, if she blows up, she blows up, and that's all there is to it!" And I reckon many another on board was thinking that way, too. Yet, even so, perhaps it's that kind of attitude which, in time of trouble, helps fellows to win through in the end. When you've reached the stage that you don't care a damn what happens, it often means that things are going to be all right—though, of course, you don't realize that at the time.

Anyway, we didn't blow up, and at last we reached Durban, where with the aid of shore appliances the fire was finally extinguished. After which, in due time we reached Cavite, our destination, and landed our dangerous cargo undamaged.

On the way up to the Phillipines in this same ship we ran one calm night into a curious area of what I can only call "broken water." This was in the Straits of Malacca, off Penang.

From the bridge the "broken water" was visible quite some distance off, and looked exactly like the sea breaking over shallows. The white of the foam showed strangely clear in the darkness, but actually there were no shallows in that region. The Old Man slowed the ship down as we approached. There are such things as submarine upheavals, which thrust up the bottom of the sea in places and so create shoals where before there had been

safe deep water. The Old Man considered going round this curious area of broken sea, but on either hand it stretched away as far as the eye could reach. The ship crept closer still, and then it was seen that it was not a shoal but a great wide area, hundreds of yards across, of a leaping surface joggle. The ship nosed onwards very carefully, the water making a great noise, and by the time we reached the middle of it the effect was most uncanny. There all around us was that queerly dancing sea, with spots of phosphorescence showing here and there, like eyes. The sea was a thing without order or rhythm. It flung about in all directions. And there was the feeling all the time that we were going to hit something, so that one was tensed in expectancy of the shock.

What was the cause of this extraordinary phenomenon I do not know; in all my many years of sea experience I have never seen anything like it. It certainly wasn't anything in the nature of a tide rip. One possible explanation was that it was a tremendous multitude of large fish, a mighty migration. At any rate, we were tremendously glad when we were through that broken area, and in normal conditions once more.

Another thing that happened on that trip was the strange death of one of the Chinese firemen. The man literally willed himself to die, in order to get even with one of the engineers.

The engineer had cuffed the Chinaman for some fault, and the other glared sulkily in return. "All 'li, you come solly for this! You come welly solly!" he said. "Get on with your job and stop talking!" said the engineer, and cuffed the fellow

again. The Chinaman proceeded to grow more sulky than ever. Everything had taken place in the presence of his compatriots, and perhaps he belonged to some caste that made it especially humiliating for him to be so treated in their presence. Anyway, there was no doubt about the sufferer being genuinely and deeply upset. "Me go die," he said. "Me go die, and then you welly solly." After which he repeated: "Me go die," and shuffled away. "Die, me foot!" however, was the engineer's only comment.

But it happened all right. The Chinaman went to his bunk and lay down, and that evening it was reported that he was ill—or, if not ill exactly, with something definitely the matter with him. We happened at the time to have a passenger who was a doctor—like many other tramp ships, we had accommodation for a passenger or two—and he examined the "sick" man. But he could find nothing the matter. There was no question of the man's having taken a drug or poison of any kind. "He is perfectly well—yet he is dying," said the doctor.

In the morning the Chinaman was worse. Some tonics and other medicines were given him, but without effect. I went along and had a look, and found him a ghastly sight, lying there. His yellow skin had gone a kind of muddy colour, and his eyes were growing dull. I spoke to him, but he didn't answer. One of the men shook him and sat him up. But he sank back again. You could almost see the life going from him. •

By midday he was just breathing. The doctor made another careful examination, but there was

no trace of anything the matter—except that he was dying! It was not that his heart was growing slower or that he had a temperature. I think he was fully conscious all the time. In fact, I think he *must* have been. For, what was killing him was his own will-power, and it seems to me he would have needed to be conscious to keep his will-power going. Finally, that same night, he died, and was buried at sea.

From what his countrymen on board told me, I gathered that the man had a notion that the engineer would get into trouble with the law for having “caused” his death. He seemed to think that the engineer would be charged with murder. If his spirit hung round afterwards it must have been very disappointed to discover that nothing of the sort happened. All the same, the engineer didn’t escape feeling “solly.” He wasn’t at all responsible, of course, for the man’s death, but it was quite a while before he could rid his mind of that picture of that Chinaman looking at him sulkily and repeating: “All ’li, me go die!”

We spent some time at Manila. A good place, normally, for shell-backs to enjoy themselves is Manila, what with dark-eyed Señoritas, the dance-halls, the Silver Dollar Saloon and what-not. We also enjoyed ourselves visiting other ships in the harbour in a rather peculiar manner.

We often swam there, instead of using boats. It was midsummer and the water was warm, and in the cool of the late afternoon it was fine to slip over the side in bathing gear, three or four of us, all young ships’ officers. We could swim off to the nearest ship, and be welcomed on board and



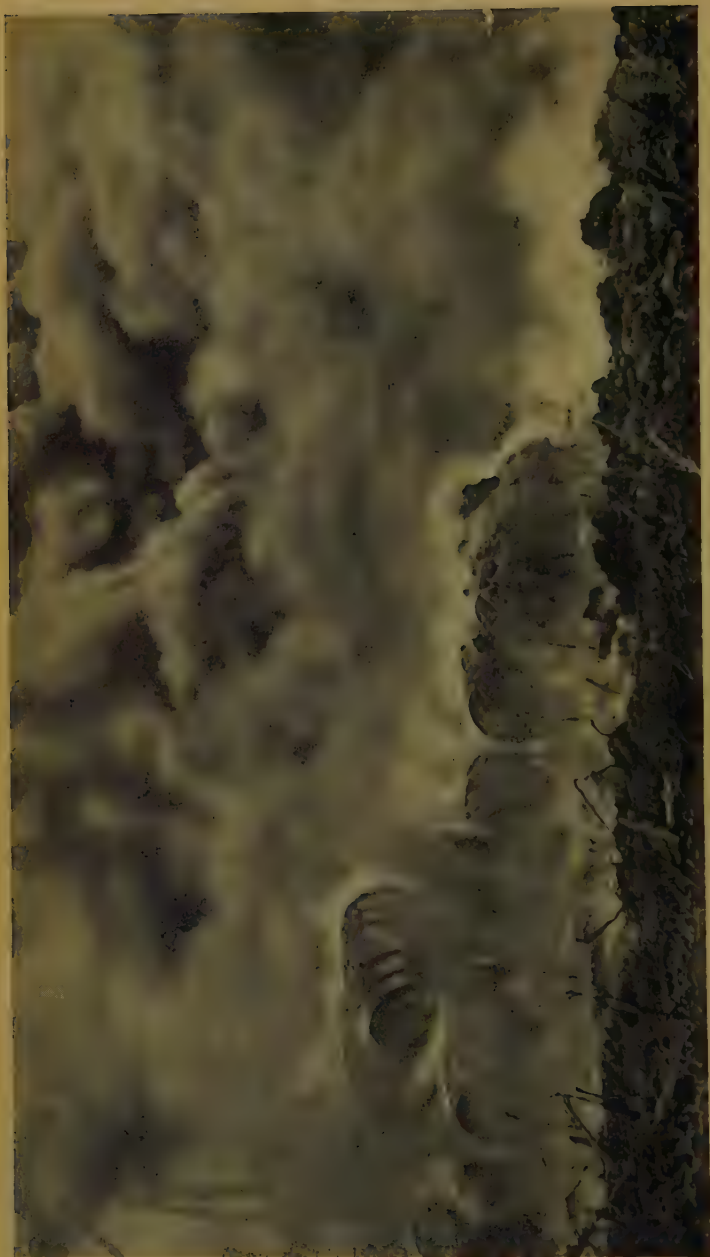
PORT NELSON, WITH DREDGER WHICH NEVER WORKED
[see page 199]

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PETROL SUPPLIES ON FIRE: A DISTANT PHOTO
See close-up picture overleaf

[see page 199]



PORT NELSON PETROL SUPPLIES ON FIRE BY ACCIDENT
Author and his camera suffered slight damage

[see page 199]

given a drink, whereupon we would swim off to the next ship, and so on round a number of vessels. We knew many of the officers on these vessels, and were all good friends together. Often they would join us in our visiting-by-swimming, so that there would be quite a party of us. It was all very gay and irresponsible. Yes, and I liked being irresponsible in those days! I think there must have been a bit of the nomad savage in me. How we used to laugh on those swimming visits! If any member of the party got too drunk to swim, we would sit him in a life-buoy and tow him back to his ship!

But it wasn't all drinks and swimming at Manila. One day as I stood on deck looking idly shoreward, I was astounded to see a house on the slope just behind the water-front give a kind of jerk. I rubbed my eyes, thinking they were deceiving me. But it was true enough. An instant later the house gave another jerk, then swayed and collapsed, sending up a cloud of dust and small debris. Other houses about it likewise collapsed, and a second or two later a deep rumbling came to my ears. It was the beginning of the great Manila Earthquake. As sight is quicker than sound, I had seen the houses collapse before the sound of the earthquake reached me.

It was very queer watching that town being shaken to pieces. From the harbour we could see it very well. Apart from the horror of it all, there was something fascinating about it. The whole thing seemed so utterly incredible. Staid edifices staggered and fell like drunken men. Buildings that had taken long to erect and had stood there

for many, many years, went tumbling over as if they had been the most gimcrack affairs. I remember watching, through a glass, a great crack appear in a stone wall of such strength that it would have offered very good resistance to heavy artillery by fire. The ease with which that crack appeared was uncanny. Sailors are, of course, very much aware of the power of the sea—the sea that can throw an enormous vessel about like a cork. But, standing there watching the devastation in Manila, I had an awareness that I'd never had before of the power of the land, so to speak.

For some time we wandered about the East, landing or picking up cargoes. We spent a day or two here, a day or two there—Nagaski, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Kobe, Singapore; I forget where else. A string of names like that looks romantic, but I don't know if there was much romance about it all at the time. I had my job to do, and that was the principal thing. None the less, life was never dull; no two days were the same. Nowadays in London I sometimes look at the multitudes of people streaming along the streets, and thrusting themselves into cages as they go down to the underground trains, and I think how restricted and sheeplike it all is. I wonder how they can do it. . . .

The things we had to do at sea! We had to use our initiative. We had on board half a dozen enormous, old-fashioned Scotch steam boilers for a big ship-building firm at Kobe. They weighed I know not how many tons—far too much, anyway, for any of the barges. The thing was to get them ashore. There was no wharf that we could lie against, and we were anchored about a mile out.

It looked like a serious problem, until someone hit upon the idea of *floating* them ashore in tow of a tug! And that was what we did; first plugging up all the outlets and inlets in order to make the boilers watertight, then heaving them overboard as the ship rolled slowly to the swell.

The little Japanese captain of the steam-tug that had the job of towing the boilers ashore, raised his cap in admiration to the officers of our ship for their ingenuity. He really meant it, too, and when you find a Japanese being sincere in a matter like that you may be sure that the job was a good one.

Oh, yes, this was an eventful voyage all right! The excitement began right at the beginning—a little before it, in fact. We were lying beside the wharf at New York, our original place of departure. One night we found that the ship was away from the wharf and drifting out. There might have been a serious accident—a collision or grounding—and it was only by good luck that there wasn't. What had happened was that thieves had cut and stolen our mooring lines! They had crept up in a small boat, and with a large, sharp knife on the end of a pole reached up and cut the forward lines close up to the ship, while confederates ashore cast off the wharf-end of the lines and dropped them into the boat. The manœuvre was then repeated with the stern lines. Our lines were of very good quality rope, for which the thieves no doubt got quite a bit of money.

Then, too, there was the day we got stuck in the Suez Canal. The ship didn't steer any too well, and she bothered the French pilot who had the job of taking her through the Canal a great deal. She

was one of those ships—I've seen motor-cars that suffered from the same complaint—where you had constantly to be twisting the wheel a little bit this way, then a little bit that way, in order to keep her going straight. After a while the French pilot—a none too phlegmatic person at any time—got in a bit of a dither, with the result that the ship suddenly slewed on him and came to a stop with her nose in one bank of the Canal and her stern aground in the other.

A lovely place for a ship to go ashore in! It wasn't that there was any danger; it was simply that we completely blocked the Canal—the most frequented waterway in the world!

A traffic hold-up in the Strand couldn't have been any worse. On either side of us ships began to line up. The French are a pretty excitable people at any time, but you never saw such a fuss as those French Canal people made over the stranding. Canal officials swarmed about the vessel, all jabbering away. The pilot came in for a bad time, and the ship and her officers also had their share. In the matter of abuse we gave as good as we got, but since the Frenchmen spoke hardly anything but French, and we spoke in hardly anything but English, I suppose a lot of it was wasted.

Meanwhile time was passing, the Canal was still blocked, and the number of ships waiting to go through was rapidly increasing. You would have thought that all the ships in the world had chosen just that day to go through the Suez Canal. Four hours went by, six hours. Powerful steam-tugs strove to free us. Numbers of Arabs and Egyptians appeared on the shore on both sides of the Canal.

Some were content merely with the spectacle, others were quick to seize the opportunity to peddle Brummy amber and "real" scarabs "from Pharoah's tomb, Meester Mackenzie," to the people. (These sort of Arabs usually call all Europeans by a Scotch name, such as Mackenzie, MacPherson, MacTavish, often using as well the Christian name "Jock." They also take these names themselves, and acquire a Scotch accent, probably through mixing with Scots on the various ships.)

Eight hours in all elapsed before there came from the crowd about the bank a loud "Aah" as it was seen that the efforts of the tugs were at last succeeding and our ship being freed from the shore. A few minutes later we were proceeding on our way, and the normal traffic of the Canal was resumed. That loud "Aah" of the Arabs and Gyppos might have been a loud sigh of disappointment that this unlooked for opportunity for selling their rubbishy imitation curios to innocent sailormen was at an end.

Yet again, there was the night when we ran down some fishing junks and sampans in the China Sea. These fishing craft were everywhere, usually in scattered groups; and a darned nuisance they were. As lights might scare off the fish, they usually lay there in complete darkness, which of course is no way to behave. I reckon that the fellows in charge of Chinese fishing junks are the most careless seamen anywhere. Fancy being anchored or drifting without lights right out in a fairway or middle of a steamer track! But there they were, and they were always getting run down, though I think seldom with any serious loss of

life. You couldn't drown those Chinks if you tried!

Well, there we were steaming along that night—or rather, early morning, for it was just a little before dawn—when suddenly some lights showed only a few yards ahead and there came a yelling and shouting in Chinese. We were almost on top of a number of junks, and it was only at this last moment that they hurriedly produced lanterns to show us that they were there. But it was too late. We were right on them, and the ship pushed her way through among them, scraping past one here, turning another one over there.

There was a terrible uproar. Chinese are the world's champion shriekers. They sounded like a lot of animals rather than humans. I have no doubt that our propeller was making a mess of their nets. The masts of the junks showed dimly all around us. Now and again there were shadowy glimpses of people from the wrecked junks hurriedly scrambling on board those that remained. Everything was noise, movement, and smell. You could definitely smell the Chinks, their food and joss-sticks.

But at last we were clear of the junks, and it was not till some little time later that we found that one of the crew of a junk that we had encountered had scrambled on board the ship for safety. As our ship had rails, not bulwarks, it had been a comparatively easy matter for the Chinaman to get a grip of one of our portholes and clamber up to the rail and on to the deck. The refugee was a thin little man, the colour of dust, and so wrinkled and loose of skin that he might have been some

sort of parched creature blown in by a sandstorm. It was not till after daylight that we realized he was on board, and at once we looked about for a junk to which we could transfer him. The fishing fleet, however, was now a good way astern of us, and we didn't feel like going back.

In the end we sighted a junk some little distance ahead, and indicated to the Chinaman that we proposed to put him aboard. At once the fellow made a tremendous fuss, pointing to the vessel and shaking his head. He begged and gesticulated, but our Chinese firemen couldn't speak this fellow's dialect and no one knew what he was getting at. Our Captain, nevertheless, wasn't standing any nonsense of that sort, and he had the man put out on the junk, and we steamed on our way.

Some time later, at one of the ports, we heard the reason of the man's reluctance to board that particular junk. It appeared that a little while back the Chinese fisherman had defrauded the captain of that selfsame craft of a considerable sum of money by a very mean trick, and the captain had sworn to give him the beating of his life, should he ever get him in his power. So that we, by delivering the offender to the righteous anger of the man he had robbed, had been the unwitting agent of Nemesis.

Finally, there was my experience in a house in a notorious street in Singapore.

I was a member of the Legion of Frontiersmen, and very interested in the movement. In Raffles Hotel, the first night I went ashore, I got talking with one of the white residents, and I asked him if he knew the address of the Singapore command

of the Legion. He was a pleasant-spoken young man, and I didn't in the least suspect that he was trying to have a joke with me when he said:

"Oh, yes, I know it quite well. You don't know Singapore, I suppose?"

"No," I answered, "I haven't been much ashore here."

"This is the address, then," he said, and gave me a number in a certain street. "Any rickshaw man will take you there."

I thanked my informant and was soon bowling along in a rickshaw. We passed through a native quarter, and along some dimly lit streets. I began to think it was a queer sort of a district for the Legion to be housed in, and after a time stopped the rickshaw and asked the native who pulled it if he was sure that he was going to the address that I had given him. He assured me that he was, and we went on again. At last we pulled up outside a house, and I got out and went up to a door. In response to my knock the door was opened instantly, and the moment I entered I knew that it certainly was not the Legion's place.

I found myself in a kind of dance-hall and bar combined, garishly lit and thick with smoke. Some sort of native band was playing at the farther end. The place was packed with people—Chinese, Japanese, mixed breeds of all kinds. The night was hot, and there was a reek of heated bodies. There were a number of highly-painted women, some so nearly nude that it made no difference. I was the only white man there.

I was furiously angry at the way in which I had been tricked, and longed to get my hands on

that young fellow down at Raffles Hotel. For some moments I stood looking at the scene, and thinking that I had seldom set eyes on such a villainous-looking crew.

A slim young woman, with olive skin and slanted eyes, came up to me, ogling. I wasn't in the mood for any of that sort of stuff, however, and I told her to shove off. She scowled. Another came up. "You likee *me*, Meester?" This one was a fat half-Malay, half-Chinese, with very reddened cheeks and great, floppy breasts. Even in happier circumstances, I would have been repelled. "I certainly don't!" I said, and turned towards the door.

But I found a number of men had gathered about the entrance with the obvious intention of preventing my leaving. I wasn't to be allowed to go without spending money! At that moment a bar attendant came up with bottles and glasses on a tray. "Drinks, sar? Goot Eengleesh w'isky!" It would have been lunacy to take a drink in such circumstances; the odds were ten to one that it was doped.

With my refusal I saw the fellows round the door scowl, and I told myself that it was imperative that I got out with all possible speed. I had a fairly large sum of money on me—two months pay—and I didn't want to lose it. I was fairly good with my fists, but I knew it would be hard to fight off a gang like that and at the same time prevent them picking my pockets. A man engaged in fighting makes an easy prey for a pickpocket. There was the chance, too, that the affair might go even farther than that. Chinese are adept knife-throwers, and

I knew that if things got very nasty a knife might come sailing over and take me in the throat—always a favourite mark. At the same instant the lights would be snapped out, and there would be no way of identifying the thrower.

Unexpectedly the situation was saved for me by the entry of my rickshaw man. I had not paid him, and he had come looking for me.

"My mon', my mon'," the man cried, coming over to me with outstretched hand. "Four rupee."

That gave me an idea. If I had no money, this rough-house gang would not be interested in me in the least. And putting my hand in my pocket, I allowed a look of surprise and annoyance to come over my face as I brought forth only a few cents.

"Oh!" I said. "That's all I've got. In changing my clothes to come ashore I left my money behind. You'll have to wait till I go back to the ship and get you your four rupees."

The rickshaw man appeared far from pleased, but I didn't care twopence about him. I saw, then, to my great relief, a look of disappointment on the face of the threatening group by the doorway and, after muttering to one another, they slowly moved away.

Two minutes later I was out in the street, with the rickshaw man close at my heels. The fellow was determined not to leave me till he got his four rupees. I got into the rickshaw, and when at last we came to Raffles' I got out and paid him, much to his astonishment.

In conclusion, I went and found the young man who had sent me to that wrong address. He tried to explain that it was a trick frequently played

on newcomers to Singapore, though he hadn't known that the particular place to which he had sent me was such a "tough joint" as it had proved to be. I was in no mood, however, for explanations, and as a result it would be a long time before that joker would be so ready with his so-called jokes again.

CHAPTER VI

A BIT OF EGYPT

ANOTHER of my ships was a luxury vessel running between Marseilles and Alexandria—a 12,000-ton, 21-knot, triple-turbine mail-steamer, in which I was a watch-keeping officer. She had a huge personnel, and was one of two such ships owned by hotel interests in Egypt. The idea was to outrival other shipping companies on the run to Egypt, by providing the greatest possible speed and luxury for passengers. On this vessel there were electric lifts—a very up-to-date innovation at the time—and a thermo tank heating and ventilating system. There were electric cigar lighters in the cabins. The saloon table appointments were of the costliest; the salt-cellars, mustard-pots, and tea-spoons being of the heaviest silver.

The hotel interests which owned the craft evidently had the idea of running her as they would have run a hotel-de-luxe ashore. Instead of stewards, we even had a *maitre d'hôtel* and his staff of waiters from a leading London hotel! But there's a world of difference between running a ship and running an hotel. On our maiden trip from England to the Mediterranean we struck bad weather, and the waiters—most of whom had hardly seen the sea before, let alone work on it—were seasick.

It was queer to see stewards seasick like that.

Passengers you naturally expect to be sick, but with stewards—well, it was against nature, so to speak. And they were very thoroughly sick, too! I heard more than one of them curse the day that ever he agreed to come and work at sea. There was a Cockney among them, I remember, who used to pretend, when on duty, to be a Frenchman (I have heard of other waiters doing this, the idea being that the persons waited upon would in some obscure way be impressed), but whose assumed nationality vanished immediately he was overtaken by seasickness. He then became a very unhappy and complaining Londoner, indeed!

Some of the men, nevertheless, stuck it out bravely as long as they could. There was one chap who seemed determined to finish his part of serving a meal, but, alas, was overcome just before the end, when he was making his precarious way among the tables of the saloon carrying a number of dishes. He managed hurriedly to put the dishes down on a table, from where the rolling of the ship immediately sent them crashing to the floor, and rushed out on deck, not a moment too soon. He was really a hero the way he had stuck to his job, but I'm afraid those few of the passengers who had turned up to that meal would have been just as glad if he had retired earlier. The sight of that waiter getting greener and greener, and disaster obviously becoming more and more imminent, was no inducement to appetite.

We officers, and others, had to take it upon ourselves to look after the passengers.

I have never known a ship—except a sailing-ship becalmed—roll as did that vessel. We carried

no cargo, and only sufficient coal for a short run; wherefore the ship was top-heavy. Passengers used to slide in heaps from one side of the deck to the other. It was necessary to hold on to something all the time. There were numerous accidents—luckily none of them very serious. Sometimes we wondered if the ship were going to turn turtle. To brighten matters a bit we officers used to have bets on the clinometer fitted to the bridge to register the angle of inclination of the ship, and see in whose watch the biggest roll was registered.

The experiment of those luxury ships didn't last more than a year. The whole thing was far too costly—in more ways than one. The silver table appointments, for example—the salt-cellars and the rest—disappeared almost as fast as they were put on the table. This, of course, was put down to souvenir hunting, but I guess that if it hadn't been for the articles' intrinsic value they would not have disappeared so rapidly. There were "leakages" in all sorts of directions; and some queer little episodes of mismanagement, too.

At Marseilles I saw a couple of very curious objects being brought on board. They were two enormous brushes, circular in shape, each 16 feet across. Behind the two men who were struggling up with these curious contraptions came other men with numbers of jointed poles. Neither the French dock labourers, who brought these things on board, nor anyone on the ship, knew what they were for, and it was not for quite a while that at last the mystery was solved. It appeared that the engine-room department had ordered some brushes for cleaning the interior of the funnel, meaning,

thereby, small hand-brushes for the use of men working suspended inside. But the French shore people had misunderstood, and made a pair of brushes, one for each funnel, after the style of a chimney-sweep's, with jointed rods complete! As the funnels of that ship were 16 feet across, and you could have run a double-decked omnibus through them, it can be imagined the enormous size of the ridiculous brushes that had been sent us.

One other incident comes to my mind. It concerned a night-watchman and the theft of a sum of money.

Being a luxury ship, we often carried rich people accustomed to having considerable sums in their personal possession. About two o'clock one morning one of these rich passengers dashed out of his cabin, and reported to me that 90 sovereigns had disappeared from his trousers pocket. The money was safely in his possession when he had retired to his single-berth cabin about 11 o'clock, but now they were indubitably gone. No one had entered the passenger's cabin except himself, and altogether it looked like a complete mystery.

At length the passenger mentioned the fact that, on changing into his pyjamas, he had folded his trousers and put them in the rack above the bunk. Now the cabin was on the side of the ship, there was a port-hole near the rack, and obviously the thief had lowered himself down over the side from the deck above, reached through the port-hole and taken the money that way. That much was clear. The thing was—who had done it?

We went in search of the night-watchman, to see if he had seen or heard anything suspicious.

But he was not at his post, and we were unable to find him. Then, as I went round I noticed a gleam of light in the smoke-room, where, of course, at that hour, all should have been in darkness. I peered in through the glass doors, and an astonishing sight met my eyes. At the farther end of the room was the watchman. He was kneeling on the floor before one of the settees, and on this settee he was counting out numbers of sovereigns. He looked oddly like some sort of religionist at his devotions. On the floor beside him was a whisky-bottle and glass.

I opened the door and went towards him. He sprang up at my coming, tried to shovel the sovereigns back into his pockets, then gave up the idea and flung himself at me. His eyes were wild and staring, and I saw that he was more than half-drunk. There was a short, sharp struggle, and I secured him.

We reached Alexandria next day, where the delinquent was handed over to the police. We then learned exactly what had taken place. The man quite freely confessed. He had noticed that the rich passenger carried a considerable sum on him, and thought he might as well try and get it. To this end, in the quiet of midnight, he had lowered himself by means of a rope over the side, and abstracted the money through the port-hole in the way already described. It was most unlikely that of all the hundreds of people on the ship, he, the trusted watchman, would be suspected. His plan was to convert the sovereigns into Egyptian and other currency at Alexandria next day, when he would have been perfectly safe. Even if he hadn't done this, but had kept the sovereigns, he would



THE AUTHOR

Our quarters after we built a log building [see page 198]



SERGT. WALKER AND AUTHOR

First police post at Port Nelson, Hudson Bay

[see page 198]



STORES ON WAY TO HUDSON BAY POST
York Factory boat just preparing to shoot rapids

still have been quite safe, sovereigns being common currency in those days. There would, in fact, have been nothing to connect him with the robbery, and all he would have had to do was to remain unconcerned at his duties.

But the knowledge of having come into so much money had proved too much for the thief. It had excited him, and he felt that he must do something to celebrate the occasion. Accordingly he had gone and knocked up the bar steward, telling him that one of the passengers wanted a bottle of whisky. He had given the steward one of the sovereigns, and told him to keep the change. Then, with the whisky and the glass, he went into the smoke-room and had a drink, cautiously, in the darkness. Presently he had another drink, and then another, after which his caution grew less.

A great desire awakened in him to see exactly how much money he had obtained. His fingers itched to be counting those golden sovereigns. He had another drink, and put on one of the lights. Such a thing was madness, of course, but he was by then in no mood for cold caution. He tipped out the sovereigns on to the settee; and it was there, while he was kneeling and counting them, that I appeared on the scene.

The erring watchman received a sentence of nine months' imprisonment at Alexandria. If ever a man had been let down by the demon drink, it was he! . . .

A fine town was Alexandria—with its double harbour, the great Pharos lighthouse looking out over the Mediterranean, its streets thronged with people of all nationalities. There was always a

feeling of abundance and comfort. Of all the places which I, as a sailor, have visited, there have been few that I have liked more than this city which was established so long ago by Alexander the Great on the delta of the Nile. But it had also its tough aspects. There was an occasion when two women tried to make a friend and myself the victims of an iniquitous plot.

We were sitting in one of the large foreign cafés. Presently two women came up and took seats at our table. They were very smartly dressed, and their manner was attractive. In places like Alexandria there is a free and easy atmosphere, and they soon got into conversation with us, in English and in French. We all had a drink together, and cigarettes were passed round. We talked more or less aimlessly on various subjects; and then one of the women asked, in English:

"Do you speak German?"

Now, I knew no German, but my friend spoke that language very well, having lived long in Germany. Yet when I answered the woman: "No, I don't!" my friend replied to her that he didn't speak German either. The reason for this was that he suspected the women were up to some game or other. And I might say that I half-suspected something of the kind myself.

It was then that the fun began. The women tried to get us drunk, and lure us out of the café to a place where we could be robbed. In the German which they thought neither of us understood, they talked to one another about it. My friend translated the German to me afterwards, and the conversation went something like this:

First woman, in English: "Why do you only drink beer? Why not you have some whisky? It is better drink." She smiled seductively.

Second woman, in French: "Or a cognac? It is the water of life." Her eyes were full of allure.

Myself: "I'd rather have beer, thank you!"

My friend: "Whisky very soon makes me drunk. Whrrr!"

First woman: "Oh, a little won't hurt you!" Then, to the second woman, in *German*: "We shall have to get them a bit drunk somehow."

Second woman, in German: "Yes. And then—shall we take them to your place or to mine?"

First woman, in German: "To mine. It is a hard place for strangers to find, and afterwards they will not know where it is."

Second woman, in German: "One drink each will be enough when we get them there." (This last undoubtedly was to be a doped drink, our taking of which would be a climax of the plot.)

The two women turned to us again.

"Come on, let us be merry!" said one, while the other beckoned a waiter, and ordered whisky for us.

We allowed the whisky to be brought and poured out. It was evil-looking stuff—not real whisky at all, but some hideous mixture in which raw methylated spirit played a prominent part. Such alleged whisky is a characteristic of certain cafés in places like Alexandria and Port Said. The only thing to drink in those places is bottled English beer: a bottle of beer has to be freshly opened for each customer, and therefore cannot be tampered with; whereas any evil mixture can be poured into

a whisky-bottle labelled as containing the finest quality.

We left our glasses untouched. We chatted on pleasantly, and smoked. Presently the women, who were drinking wine, looked at us impatiently over their glasses.

"Come on, drink up, messieurs!" said one.

"*A vos santes!*" said the other, raising her glass.

And still we made no move to touch the whisky.

"Not very easy, are they?" said the first woman to the other in German, in an irritated tone.

"Perhaps they suspect us," murmured the other.

It was then that my friend decided that the comedy had gone far enough.

"No, we don't suspect," he said, in fluent German. "We know! I've had a great deal of fun listening to your private conversation with one another."

It was impossible to imagine two women more taken aback. Until, recovering themselves to some extent, they raved furiously at us, and no doubt in the end would have brought some false charge against us to save their faces. However, as luck would have it, an English officer of the Egyptian Police came in, whom we happened to know. He waved his hand to us, and came over to our table.

That was the end of the affair. The last thing the women wanted was contact with the police. They rose immediately, curbed their rage for the moment, bowed to us and smiled with bitter-sweetness, and hurriedly left the café. We never saw them again; but we heard about them. They belonged to a notorious gang of crooks, and soon after our encounter with them they were both

deported to Germany, the country of their origin.

In this matter of crooks and cheats, none the less, Alexandria is not in it with Port Said. At Port Said there is never a moment when you are not pestered by someone or other trying to get something out of you for nothing, or for very little indeed. You sit down at a café table, and immediately feel an Arab urchin at your feet, perfunctorily dusting your shoes with a rag, for which alleged service he demands exorbitant payment and kicks up a devil of a fuss if he doesn't get it.

The moment you have got rid of the boot-boy a native conjurer appears, and whether you want it or not gives a performance; producing live chickens from nowhere, and making coins, eggs, and other objects vanish—to reappear in unexpected places. Some of these conjurers are little more than children, and many of them are very clever. They are trained to the conjuring business from early childhood—almost as soon as they can walk—much as a small English child might be taught the rudiments of piano-playing.

The most remarkable conjuring I ever saw, however, was by an Indian whom I once saw in Mesopotamia. He did his tricks on the bank of the Tigris, and one of them concerned a coco-nut shell full of water. There was a hole in the side of the shell, through which the water flowed or stopped flowing as he commanded. The shell was just an ordinary coco-nut shell; I examined it before the trick began, and also afterwards. The water was that of the Tigris, and the shell had been filled by the simple process of dipping it in the river. There

was no stage or paraphernalia of any kind. The conjurer merely placed the shell full of water on the bare sand, and then stood back from it several feet. At no time during the trick did he approach it. The only words he spoke were the Hindustani ones for: "Flow!" and "Stop!". In each instance the water flowed or stopped instantly, at the word of command. How it was done, I don't know. Was it a case of the power of mind over matter? Certainly, there on that bare sand, it was a remarkable spectacle.

Those Port Said conjurers are interesting enough the first time one sees them, but when it comes to scores of times—well, it is easy to wish them in Hades. The trouble is they are so abominably insistent. Again at every turn there are beggars, who walk along beside one whining for money. There are men who stumble up against you and fall, and then, loudly declaring themselves to be seriously hurt, claim monetary compensation. There are vendors of such things as boxes of Turkish delight, which have a layer of Turkish delight on top and underneath only paper and rubbish. There are vendors of all kinds of "Brummy" jewellery and fake Egyptian antiques, "straight from Pharaoh's tomb." And there are men who sidle along beside you, whispering that they have some remarkably indecent photographs for sale. I have even known these fellows to come whispering to me in this way while I was accompanied by a lady, a passenger from the ship.

My worst experience in Egypt, however, occurred very much earlier in my career. The story was told me by my mother, years later.

It was when I was a child of three. My father was an officer on the Commissariat and Transport staff at Cairo, and with my mother I spent some of my early years in Egypt. My mother and I—she on a trotting mule and I on a donkey—often went for little rides out into the desert, usually accompanied only by one servant, a faithful young man called Mahomet. One morning, when we were beside the Great Pyramid of Cheops, I got off my donkey for some reason; whereupon the animal gaily trotted back towards home, and Mahomet ran after him to bring him back.

As soon as Mahomet had gone, one of a number of evil-looking Arabs, who had been hanging about, picked me up in his arms and climbed some distance up the Pyramid. Then he shouted down to my mother: "Baksheesh! Baksheesh!" at the same time holding me above his head, making it clear that he would throw me down to the ground if my mother did not pay the money he demanded.

It was a terrible situation for my mother. An Arab such as that was capable of any iniquity. But she kept her head, and ordered the man to bring me down at once. The Arab refused, and repeated his demand for baksheesh. It is difficult to imagine what would have happened eventually, but for the timely return of Mahomet. The latter had seen from afar what was happening and, abandoning the pursuit of the donkey, had hurried back to the rescue.

As agilely as a goat, our servant youth scrambled up the Pyramid. There was about him an air not only of a rescuer, but also of an avenger. The Arab didn't like the look of him at all, and,

putting me down none too gently, started swiftly to descend. But he had started a moment too late, and Mahomet caught him. A sharp struggle ensued, at the end of which instead of my being thrown down from the Pyramid, it was the Arab.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIVER TO MANDALAY

AT last, after much deep-sea-going, and getting my various certificates, I found myself in Burma, where I became master of one of the Irrawaddy River steamers, plying principally between Rangoon and Mandalay. They were fine boats, those Irrawaddy mail-steamers, large, up-to-date paddle-craft, comfortable and efficient. I doubt if there is a better river service anywhere in the world. They carried a captain and six officers, who were British, and an Indian crew, including about 50 stewards. The pursers were college-trained Burmans who, when necessary, acted as interpreters. The ships' fittings were magnificent, and the engines were of the latest design for power and speed.

And what a river to be working on! It would be impossible to think of anything more romantic and colourful. Temples, pagodas, shrines—we were constantly coming to them on the banks. Often it was like a real-life fairyland. There was one place where the whole of the high cliff rising sheer up from the water was covered with figures of Buddha. I remember seeing it one sunrise, and I just stood and stared. The light of the rising sun first laid a band of gold along the top of the cliffs, making a couple of lines of Buddhas stand out sharply, and appear almost alive. Most of them

were in niches, rather like tiny doorways, and they might have seated themselves there but a little while before. As the sun rose, the golden light came farther and farther down the cliff, revealing more and more of the Buddhas. It was exactly as if a curtain was being drawn down off them. The light caught some of the Buddhas at such angles that their eyes seemed to twinkle, while little fleeting shadows gave them an appearance of movement. It was really a most impressive spectacle, and the cameras of the passengers on our steamer never ceased clicking.

At another place the high bank, or cliff, of the river was not only covered with carvings of Buddha, but also riddled with caves. There must have been scores of them, large and small—many with gaping mouths. It is said that long ago these caves were the homes of a number of priests of a most austere order. On the top of the cliff was a pagoda, from where the view must have been magnificent; looking out, as it did, up and down the river and across the country on both sides. If those austere priests ever got weary of the gloom of the caves, they had merely to climb up to the pagoda to refresh their eyes with a wonderful view.

Villages and townships were innumerable, a number of them of great historical interest.

One village we saw where, during the first Anglo-Burmese war, an important Burmese general, who had been compelled to retreat from Rangoon, made a final stand against the British. He had some 15,000 men and large numbers of cannon. He erected considerable earthworks, and being really a great soldier, so strong did he make

the place that the attacking British troops were for a long time repulsed. It was no small thing for a native Burman to defy the might of Britain in such a fashion. The place was finally captured only after artillery reinforcements had been brought up, and the place bombarded. Then it was found that in the night, during the bombardment, the Burmese had evacuated the town—leaving behind them the body of their general, who had been killed.

Yet to our eyes, all those years afterwards, a more peaceful setting than those native settlements on the banks of that 900 miles stretch of river between Rangoon and Mandalay, could hardly have been imagined. There you saw them, irregular groups of thatched cottages, some on sticks so that they looked like a giant species of thin- and many-legged birds. Boats, with high-carved prows, lay in against the shore; figures were busily attending to the wicker fishing-traps upon the craft; cattle were quietly drinking at the water's edge. And in the village beyond there would be children playing in the shade of the great mango trees, and men and women sitting about, smoking, yarning, or weaving silk on quaint, home-made looms. The sound of their soft voices and easy laughter would come floating over the water.

Every few miles I would come across a scene like this. And some of the settlements were quite big places, too. There was one that had a population of about 10,000, living mostly in one long street straggling parallel with the river.

Nevertheless, so far as I was concerned, as the captain of a river-steamer, there was always something liable to happen.

One day I saw two timber-rafts ahead, just rounding a bend. They were enormous things, with huts on them, and men and their wives and families and dogs and chickens. They were keeping well apart, and, there being plenty of room for me to take my vessel in between them, I had that course steered. Just, however, as I was almost past the rafts, I saw that, in a most inexplicable manner, they were sweeping in towards my steamer, one upon either side.

The people on the rafts yelled and shouted, and the next moment the two large structures struck us, smashing against our paddle-boxes and seriously damaging the floats. The long and heavy teak logs on the rafts flew up and about in all directions. The huts collapsed. People, together with dogs and chickens, were thrown into the water. You never saw such confusion. It was hours before things were made straight again.

The cause of the disaster had been simply that, in order to help one another round the river bend, the rafts had a long, stout rope stretched from one to the other. This rope was just under the water, and the prow of the steamer had found it and, forging ahead, naturally brought the rafts swinging in towards one another, with the steamer in between.

In some places the river was nothing more than a narrow defile. There the rocky banks on either side were of very great height, rising straight up from the water and shutting out the sunlight except when the sun was directly overhead. The speed of the current in such places was tremendous. The river-steamers were powerful craft, but in those

defiles it was all they could do to move up-stream at all. For an hour at a time I would seem to be almost stationary in spite of the fact that we were steaming full-speed ahead. They were nerve-wrecking strips of water. They were so deep that we couldn't anchor, and there was certainly no place where we could tie up.

Furthermore, there was always the chance of meeting another vessel coming down-stream! This happened to me quite a lot. As we were trying to force our way up against the current, I would suddenly see ahead the down-river mail-vessel, perhaps—a sister ship of my own. There she would be, approaching at full speed, and just as unable to pause in her career as ourselves. It called for extremely careful steering to enable the two vessels safely to pass one another, there was so precious little room. Sometimes the rush of the current would slew the other vessel, and then it was a case of especially nice judgment on the wheelsman's part.

The narrow squeaks that we Irrawaddy skippers had in those defiles! Many were the occasions when it seemed that nothing could prevent two vessels from colliding; looking back, it seems to me positively miraculous that we escaped as we did. And, indeed, on account of their task being so trying on the nerves, skippers were seldom kept on those runs for more than a year at a time.

In some parts of the river we travelled a good deal at night, with searchlights playing on the water to show us the way. The brilliance of those searchlights attracted innumerable insects, including huge water-beetles. They flew up towards the light in

clouds. They covered the decks and awnings. They were big, solid, unpleasant things, and it was no joke to have them smacking into one's face in the darkness. But we had to put up with them. It would have been no fun trying to get along without the searchlights.

Week after week, month after month, I took various steamers up and down that great river, in some places more than two miles wide; picking up and dropping all sorts of passengers, all sorts of cargoes, in all sorts of places. At one spot I had to take the ship alongside a mill on the river bank, and unload a cargo of ground-nuts. The ground-nuts were immediately put through the mill, and I presently received them back as a cargo of (1) "oil cake," and (2) "pure cotton seed oil" in five gallon tins. The ground-nuts—or pea-nuts as they are more commonly called—had certainly undergone a complete and rapid transformation.

Now and again I'd come across a native carnival taking place. At these events there was a lot of canoe racing. The canoes were of the usual dug-out variety, but the manner in which they were rowed was not usual, by a long chalk. The rowers rowed with their legs! Each man stood on one leg on the gunwale of the canoe. His other leg was twisted round the paddle, which was very long. His toes gripped the edge of the blade like fingers, and the haft of the paddle reached up to somewhere about his shoulder. Grasping the haft with his hands, he sort of back-kicked with his foot, which held the blade. On some boats or canoes there would be as many as forty of these fellows perched thus on the gunwale, working the paddles

with their feet. It looked extremely difficult, but, I suppose, like many other things, it was easy when you knew how. It also looked queerly ridiculous. Anyway, the rowers could get up a good speed, every bit as fast as if they had used the paddles in the ordinary way. They grunted or chanted as they went along, in time to the strokes of the paddles, while the numerous spectators ashore, or in boats and canoes, shouted excitedly. Sometimes a gong was beaten to keep the time. As the end of a race approached, and the chanting and the gong became faster, it was all most thrilling, I can tell you!

The river dwellers were a happy people, but the grim spectre of cholera only too frequently overshadowed their lives. At Mandalay—romantic name—I found many and many a native house with a notice on the door indicating the number of people who had died within. It might have been a sort of parallel to what happened in London during the Great Plague.

It was intensely moving to see those houses like that. But it was hard to help the stricken people. The police carefully and thoroughly disinfected certain wells, making them safe for drinking purposes, then tried to persuade the people to use them exclusively, and leave the river water alone. Since the river acted for many of the villages as a sewer, drinking its water was one of the chief causes of the spread of the epidemic. In many places along the bank red flags were displayed as warnings against the impurity of the water. All this was painstakingly explained to the natives, but the people refused to use the water from the purified

wells. They had got it into their heads that the police were poisoning the wells, and consequently drank of the infected river all the more. . . .

There was, in fact, always something happening.

Take the case of the *Kashmir*, a brand-new river-steamer, and a very fine vessel. The *Kashmir* was destroyed by fire on her first trip, and several passengers were burnt to death. There is something peculiarly shocking about a ship being lost on her opening voyage. It seems terribly unfair; the vessel hasn't had a chance to prove herself, to try herself out. Still, that's just the way of the sea, or river. It acts as a kind of saucy Fate, and there's nothing that we little human beings can do about it.

After the fire, the *Kashmir* grounded in shallow water. Her superstructure was a mass of twisted steelwork. Years later, when I saw a photograph of the twisted framework of the airship *R101*, which crashed to earth in flames in France, I was reminded of the remains of that unfortunate river-steamer in far-away Burma.

I went on board the *Kashmir's* wreck and helped to salvage the contents of the strong-room. The ship's and the passenger's money was there, most of it in silver, and laid out in trays. There were also numbers of copper coins. But the fire had fused the whole into a solid mass, together with various brass fittings and other base-metal objects. The total value of the metal was considerable; but it had, of course, to be taken to an assayer's, melted down and the base metal separated. Fire is a whole-hearted non-respecter of values, indeed!

Then, too, there was the time when I was

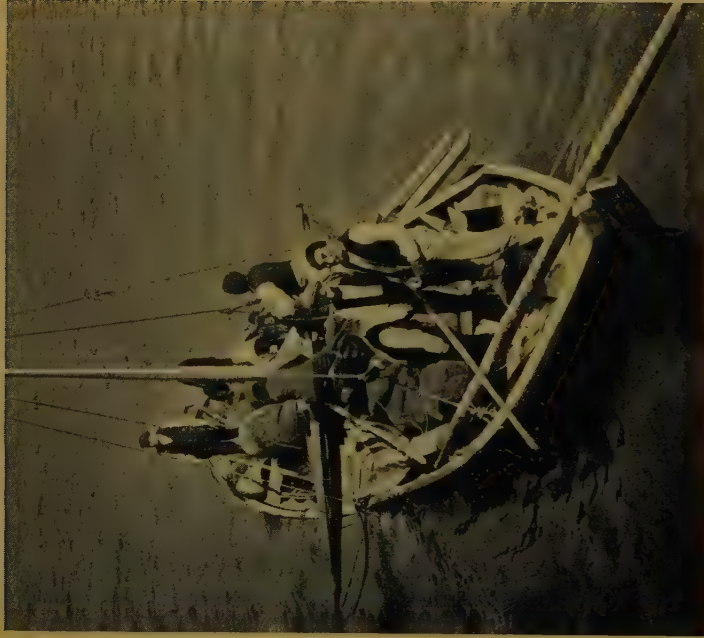


CREW OF 5-TON YORK BOAT [*see page 199*]



NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN USING TOMP STRAP
WHILST CARRYING SUPPLIES ACROSS A
PORTAGE

Five 100-lb. bags of flour in one load [*see page 190*]
WOOLWICH PUBLIC LIBRARIES.



5-TON YORK BOAT, MANNED BY NORTH AMERICAN
INDIANS, ARRIVING WITH STORES AT HUDSON
BAY COMPANY'S POST, YORK FACTORY



HOISTING SHOT POLAR BEAR ABOARD ICE-
BREAKER BELLAVENTURE, HUDSON BAY
[see page 199]

attacked by a peculiar disease. I am an extraordinarily healthy person—a fact which would make this disease all the more mysterious. It consisted of circular markings, like bruises, upon my legs. They were about the size of a penny, and from each of them blood oozed continually, though without the least pain. I endured the affliction for a bit, hoping it would go away. After, however, the usual remedies, such as iodine and permanganate of potash, had proved completely useless, as soon as I reached Rangoon I went to the hospital.

The doctors were at first as completely puzzled as myself, but after a time it was discovered that there had been one other case of that disease, and one only. The previous solitary victim had been doing work connected with petroleum; and I also had been lately running an oil-tanker a few trips. I had in the course of my duties to enter the great petroleum tanks when they were empty, for purposes of inspection. The medical people concluded that this contact with petroleum, or its after-gases, was responsible for my queer sickness, and a "diet" of calcium chloride put me right in two weeks. I mention this matter here, because it would be interesting to know if this petrol age of ours is liable to bring in a new disease.

Upon another occasion a very important personage one day came on board. He was one of those really offensive Big Hats; possessed of a most superior manner, and the sort of man who inspires hate at first sight. He was dressed in the best of white suits which the tailors of Rangoon could produce. His topee was magnificent

in its whiteness, and he wore a monocle. The day was extremely hot and, stepping on to the sponson of the paddle-box, the superior one bared his head to wipe his brow. At that moment, from the upper deck just above, there descended a full gallon of saliva! It went all over the visitor—in his hair, down his cheeks, all over his beautiful clothing. And it was not ordinary saliva, either. It was red, like blood. The superior one's pomposity vanished; he became a mere figure of fun. But, though afterwards he raved and threatened all kinds of dire punishments, there was nothing that he could really do about the affair. It had not been done on purpose. A native had merely emptied over the side a pot into which betel-nut chewers had been spitting for some time. And betel-nut chewers, you must know, always spit red—and spit a lot. . . .

Again, there was the time when we stopped to pick up an army officer as a passenger. It was only a little after sunrise, but already the heat of the sun was great. Presently the army officer appeared, with a servant carrying his gear. The officer had just got up from bed, and was in pyjamas and slippers, but because of the heat of the sun he had his topee on. He looked a ridiculous object, yet actually he was doing a very sensible thing. With the approach of the steamer he had risen from his bed, and when we got on board the steamer he immediately turned in again. . . . He had merely transhipped from bed to bed! The casualness of it all was magnificent.

Another experience was the strange robbery device of a gang of dacoits during a train journey

I once made up into the high mountains of the interior when on leave.

It was, in truth, a marvellous journey—that. In somewhere about nine hours we rose from the arid plains to a paradise of fertility, to brick houses and flowers and fruit-trees, and a lovely, cool climate where you sat around the fire in the evenings. The elevation was 8,000 feet above sea-level, but what impressed me was that in so few hours one could be in such entirely different conditions. It was like another world. I rode most of the way on the engine (the drivers of those engines were men from the Great Western Railway, England), and seldom have I enjoyed a journey more. I felt as though I were just a kid again.

The chief parts of the train were packed with native passengers. Many had on their best clothes, including the most expensive of the bandeau-like head-dresses they were accustomed to wear. These bandeaux were of first quality silk and very valuable, and it was these that the dacoits were after.

The dacoits were hidden in the bushes beside the rail-track at a certain spot. When the train approached, they set up a great shouting, and the native passengers, pushing to the windows, poked out their heads. This was what the robbers had been waiting for. They had long bramble-branches in their hands, and as the train went by they raised these branches and swept off the silken bandeaux from the passengers' heads! Then, with the bandeaux sticking to the brambles, they disappeared into the bush, leaving the passengers in a blend of surprise and lamentation.

There was a pandemonium of chattering, exclamation and expostulation. Not only had the victims of the robbers lost their head-dresses, but the faces of many had been cut and scratched by the brambles, while some had had tufts of hair torn out. Many most unnecessarily explained to each other exactly how everything had happened. One related how he had heard the shouting and immediately looked out. A young man ran around, excitedly telling everyone that he had lost his head-dress, and apparently oblivious of the fact that his hearers had been despoiled likewise. The young man had a deep cut under his eye, where a bramble had caught him.

One last picture. . . .

There was an evening when, in one of the more unfrequented sections of the river, I moored the vessel to trees on the shore. There was a great deal of jungle stretching back from the bank—thick jungle, dark and mysterious. But the night itself was peaceful enough; the only sounds the chattering of monkeys, the hooting of owls and other night-birds, the croaking of frogs, and various small chirpings and whistlings. It was, in fact, an ordinary river night, and we turned in without any premonitions of danger.

About eleven o'clock, however, one of the crew, a watchman, came and called me. He didn't like the look of things ashore, he said, and would I please come up on deck and have a look for myself. I didn't want to go, but, since a Captain keeps no watch and is on duty all the time, up I went.

I found the former peacefulness of the night entirely gone, and instead a great feeling of menace.

Strange sounds were coming from the jungle—rustlings, creakings. Now and then there was a growl or grunt, and snarls. There are large numbers of wild animals in the Burmese bush—tigers, leopards, jackals, and I got the feeling that every species was represented there in that river-side jungle.

The disturbers appeared to be still some distance off, and I decided to wait before taking any steps. By that time, nevertheless, word had gone round the ship, and most of the passengers and crew were on deck, crowding the rail and looking anxiously towards the jungle. I might mention that the wind, such as it was, was blowing directly from the ship, and consequently the hidden animals ashore would have had no trouble at all in scenting us.

Half an hour passed, during which the threatening sounds ahead came steadily closer. We were particularly aware of the stealthiness of the enemy's approach. Presently we saw here and there the gleam of eyes—tiny, dull spots of light showing momentarily in and out the trees. Moreover, there were glimpses of slinking shapes.

I'd had quite enough of things by then; and so had everyone else. The ship lay right in against the bank, and it would have been the easiest thing in the world for an animal to come leaping on board. Accordingly I hurriedly ordered the moorings to be cast off, and it was not till we were safely at anchor, well out in the stream, that we were able to breathe freely once more.

CHAPTER VIII

A SNAKE PIT

AS I have already mentioned in this book, I am a member of the Legion of Frontiersmen, and very keen on the movement. At the time of which I am writing I was a member of the London command of the Legion, but as there was no Burma command I decided to see what could be done about starting one there.

The Legion of Frontiersmen, I might explain, is an organization of men who work, live, fight, or rough it generally, in out-of-way places of the British Empire; or men who have already done those things. Among them are explorers, seafarers, miners, engineers, hunters, ranchers. They are all trained and self-reliant men, ready to answer the call of the Empire at any time. The Legion was founded in London, in 1904, and branches—or commands—were formed all over the world. Long before their services were called upon in the Great War, Frontiersmen had proved their ability and usefulness in all kinds of situations and places. In the China troubles, for example, members of the China command were instrumental in the rescuing of many Europeans from positions of great peril. In other places their activities led to a stop being put to gun-running and various rebellious tribes, and to the cessation of filibustering expeditions and

other disturbances which might have damaged the Empire's prestige.

When the Great War came, Frontiersmen were among the first to come forward. More than six hundred came over from Canada with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Of this fine body of men only about 20 survived. 1,500 Frontiersmen fell with the Anzacs in Gallipoli. The 25th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers was known as the "Frontiersmen Battalion," and was commanded by Colonel Driscoll, who led Driscoll's Scouts in the Boer War. This Battalion was raised in England by the Legion, and fought in East Africa under terrible conditions. It is estimated that altogether some 9,000 Frontiersmen were killed in the War. After the War the Legion commenced to build itself up again, so that it might be ready once more should the need recur. It is to-day gradually getting back to its normal strength.

As I have said, there was no Burma command, so I got a number of people together and we held an inauguration meeting in the Strand Hotel, Rangoon. I shall never forget it. I had put on my Legion uniform for the occasion, but it was the uniform of the London command, made of thick, heavy material, quite unsuited for the tropical climate of Rangoon. I never felt so hot and airless in all my life. But I stuck it, and made my speech, and the meeting was a great success. At the end, we enrolled forty members. It was not long before this number was raised to two hundred and forty.

From then onwards my Legion work occupied all my spare time. It was better than any recreation in the ordinary sense. I was with a crowd of

fellows who looked at life in many respects the same way as myself. We had the welfare of the Legion absolutely at heart, and it was far from being dull work. We had camping parties, sham-fights, riding and rifle-shooting. Drill never became laborious. No wonder that Frontiersmen make such good fighters! The spirit that infuses the commands wherever they may be—Australia, Egypt, Africa—is the spirit that makes for victory.

On one occasion tragedy descended upon us. We were doing some revolver-shooting, in order to get our horses accustomed to the sound of the shots. The procedure was to fire into the ground, and for some time this had gone on without mishap of any kind, though the horses pranced and reared at the shots. Then suddenly one of our number, a man named Campbell, an officer on one of the Irrawaddy steamers, fell from his horse. He had been shot. The horse of one of the men near by had reared violently just at the moment that his rider was pulling the trigger. The result was that the rider's arm was thrown up, and the bullet, instead of going into the ground, took the unfortunate Campbell in the head. The wound was fatal, and he died later in hospital.

Nevertheless, we had plenty of lighter moments.

I remember a time when, after a spell of manœuvres in the bush, a number of us returned to the hotel at Rangoon, to find we were simply covered with leeches. Those Burma leeches are the very devil. Before they get filled up with blood, they look like tiny scraps of thin black cotton, harmless and insignificant. They travel with a half-looping movement, and I have seen

strangers to the country try to pick them up, wondering what they were. Once, however, they get on you, and filled with your blood, it's another matter. The tiny thread-like objects become enormously distended. I have seen them, blood-filled, attain the thickness of a lead pencil. Looking at them thus, you could hardly believe they had once been those tiny thread-like objects at all.

Well, there we were at the hotel, with those things clinging to various parts of our bodies and gorging themselves with our blood. We picked them off as rapidly as we could. But you have to be careful in picking off a leech; as likely as not you'll break him, the head will remain in your skin, and then later you may have a bad sore.

Some of the native hotel servants helped us in ridding ourselves of the filthy things, and we noticed that they appeared unusually anxious to help. The servants brought quantities of salt, on to which they placed the leeches as they picked them off our bodies. On coming into contact with the salt, the leeches immediately disgorged the blood and were reduced to their tiny, thread-like proportions again. Whereupon the servants picked them up and put them safely in match-boxes or other receptacles.

The reason for the careful preservation of the the pests we did not discover until later. It seemed that the natives were collecting them to sell to native doctors in the town. Like the old-time doctors of England and other places, the native medicine-men used leeches a great deal; the remedy of bleeding being one on which they placed great

reliance. Perhaps the hotel servants tried to get a better price than usual for these particular leeches, by declaring them first-class workers. They had seen them on the job, and could therefore guarantee them. So could we!

Upon another day I fell into what I can only call a snake pit.

The pit in question was covered with grass, and I suspected nothing until suddenly I found my feet going through. The hole was only about waist-deep, but that was deep enough, I can tell you! There was a whole party of snakes at the bottom—I don't know how many. They were all wriggling and squirming about, and I landed squarely in the middle of them. Of all the horrible things to happen to a man! I felt the reptiles sliding over my boots and around my legs. It was lucky that I had on my uniform leggings. It was only that which saved me from being bitten. I felt the snakes strike at me again and again, but my leggings were of strong material and the fangs didn't get through. If ever I was glad I was in uniform it was then.

All this happened in about half a second. I had hardly hit the bottom of the pit before I was trying to shoot up out of it again. But it's extremely difficult to leap up out of a waist-high hole. I put my hands on the edge of the pit and tried to lift myself up, with all the time my feet scrabbling among those horrible wriggling creatures. At last I managed to get out. I was quite unharmed; I think I must be lucky as regards snakes. This was the second time in my career I had had a terribly intimate acquaintance with poisonous snakes and

had escaped without being bitten. As I got free of the hole and stood on the safe ground once more, a native came up. He looked down into the hole, and in the tone of one imparting valuable information, cried:

"Snakes down there, master!" . . . As if I didn't know!

Incidentally, although the natives were, naturally enough, afraid of snakes, they were strangely unafraid of certain other dangerous creatures. One day when I was out with some friends on horseback I had an experience of this.

As we were riding along through the bush, we suddenly became aware of a number of water-buffalo barring our way. They were ugly beasts, with enormous shoulders and great horns, seven feet across. Their heads were lowered, and they were snorting. They absolutely defied us, and it was clear that if we advanced they would charge. We didn't want to harm them, and it looked as if there was nothing for us to do but go back, or make a wide detour.

Of a sudden, however, there appeared a small native boy. He could not have been more than about ten years old, and evidently belonged to some village not far away. He looked at us, then at the buffaloes, and on grasping the situation picked up a stick and walked towards the nearest of the animals. The boy's plain intention was to give the great beast a whack, and the buffalo didn't wait. He backed, then turned and quickly retreated. He was the largest and most vicious one of them all—the leader of the herd, perhaps. The boy then picked up a stone and threw it at one of the others,

and that one, too, hastily retired. It was not long before the whole herd had disappeared.

I would like to make it quite clear that there was no question of those buffaloes being a tame herd, or anything like that. They were positively wild and savage ones. For some strange reason, while they were prepared to defy the advance of a party of horsemen, they were completely awed by a small boy with a stick. All of which seems ridiculous; but then, truth often goes to the trouble of presenting itself in just such a fashion. . . .

Oh, yes, they were great times that I spent in the Burma command of the Legion! There were plenty of humorists among them; and I like humorists. They give a delightful spice to what would otherwise be mere glumness.

There was an occasion when two of our Frontiersmen—ships' officers in the British India service—were, because of some trifling misdemeanor, transferred to what was known as the "punishment-ship." This vessel was so named because she was old and out-of-date, her engines were none too good, the hours on board were long, and she resembled an overgrown steam-barge. Moreover, she carried teak-logs, and was always full of snakes and scorpions that came out of them. She carried no passengers, and altogether was the sort of ship that seafarers enthusiastically try to avoid. They say that sailors don't care; but when it comes to craft like that old B.I. boat, they care a great deal. Finally, there was the yet further disadvantage that this ship was to sail on Christmas day, while all other ships remained in port.

At any rate, the two erring ships' officers,

together with the captain, determined to get a bit of their own back on the company's marine superintendent who had sentenced them to this punishment. Word went round that something was going to happen, and we all went along to see the fun.

We found the "punishment-ship" just about to depart, and the marine superintendent looking very annoyed indeed. The three men were in their proper positions on the ship—one officer forward, one aft, and the Captain on the bridge. Yet each of the trio had on a tall hat, jet-black with two white bands round it; in exact imitation of the colour and marking of the British India Company funnels. There was not a smile on the sinners' faces, and it was because they were so solemn and the Captain was giving his orders in his usual voice and the officers were replying with the accustomed "Aye, aye, sir!" that the thing seemed so utterly comic. It was, perhaps, a none-too-subtle gibe at the dignity of the company, as represented by the dignified marine superintendent; nevertheless, there was nothing that the latter could do about it.

CHAPTER IX

A PASSENGER OR TWO

MANY and varied were the passengers I carried up and down the Irrawaddy. Sometimes there would be numbers of native prisoners, being taken to some gaol or other. They travelled as deck-passengers, usually fastened together on a long chain, and of course, in the charge of warders or police. Fastened together like that on a chain, they often looked more like animals than men; it was a sight that stayed with one for long afterwards. Sometimes there were very young men among them, with a look of dull despair in their eyes. They were on their way to their first terms of imprisonment, and it would have been quite easy to imagine that they were by no means sure what it was all about. The white man's law and his way of thinking was something that they did not yet properly understand.

A number of the older prisoners were hardened law-breakers—dacoits, and other robbers. Many of the dacoits were murderers on their way to eventual execution, but the knowledge of their impending fate did not seem to worry them much. They were dully stoical, which, I suppose, is as good a way as any of facing up to the fact that the end of one's earthly existence is near. I have seen many members of different native races exhibit this stoicism in such circumstances. It was not despair,

but almost as if they had discovered a secret method of developing indifference. It is only among older natives that I have noticed it, however.

Those dacoits were a bad lot. There was one gang of them that I took down the river, all fastened on a chain, who had murdered I know not how many people at a certain village.

The dacoits used an ingenious trick when perpetrating their raids. As was common in many parts of Burma, the houses of a village were built on poles some distance above the ground, and in the quiet of the night the dacoits crept up and burned a certain drug under the building. The fumes of the drug went up through the floors, and rendered the people inside unconscious. Whereupon the dacoits entered the houses, and robbed to their heart's content. On this particular occasion, however, the stupefying drug had not worked properly. It had, perhaps, been burned in insufficient quantity. At any rate, as the robbers entered the houses some of the people woke up, and the dacoits, always ready killers, had stabbed them to death. I might mention that the eventual pursuit and capture of those dacoits by the police was a really smart piece of work.

I had large numbers of ordinary native passengers every trip. They were mostly a chattering throng, squatting about the deck, and were the native world in little. There would be men and women chewing betel-nut, others smoking long native cheroots, and here and there a man dozing in the shade of the awnings. Naked brown-skinned children romped about. Whenever one of them went too near the rail, or tried to climb up

on it, there would be a sharp warning cry from its mother. There would be old women, too, squatting on a mat, gossiping in low tones as their fingers were busily engaged on native lace-work or something of the kind. Some were terrible-looking old hags. There would, again, be women with babies feeding nakedly at the breast.

There was one woman, I remember, whose child had died some little while before. She was a plump young person, with large breasts, and had of necessity to relieve herself of her milk every now and again. She squirted the milk into a tin—a cigarette- or jam-tin—and passed it to those nearest to her. Her neighbours quite casually drank the stuff, handing the tin on from one to another. There was no suggestion of the affair being a rite of any kind, and I can only suggest that it was merely a matter of the economical native mind refusing to waste anything.

Often there were women approaching child-birth; and sometimes they were actually delivered of their children right there on the deck. We carried no doctor, and when it was seen that a woman was about to be delivered, I was always sent for in my position as master of the vessel. The native belief in the powers and abilities of the white man were touching. My knowledge of obstetrics was nothing very wonderful, but I did my best. A screen was erected on the deck round the woman; and after rapidly consulting the medical book belonging to the medicine-chest, and with one or two natives to help me, I would supervise the coming into the world of another little Burmese. It was seldom a difficult job. Unlike so many

civilized women, those natives had little trouble in childbirth. When all was over, according to native custom, a small wood fire was made and the newly-delivered held over the smoke and dried by it. The smoke no doubt had a disinfecting quality. Remarkably soon after that, within an hour, perhaps—the woman would be up and walking about. Then, when we reached the landing-stage, the child would be taken ashore to the water's edge and washed in the river, while, a native cigar in her mouth, the mother looked on at her ease.

Occasionally among the passengers there would be a Roman Catholic missionary—usually a Frenchman or a Belgian. Those missionaries travelled deck-passage, as the natives did, because they were so poor. They carried their own food and bits of bedding, and “did for themselves” in every way—even to the extent of washing their clothing. They were fine characters, and no doubt there was something admirable about the uncomplaining manner in which they accepted the necessity of having to travel so humbly. But I didn't like it. I was very much aware of being a white man, and of the importance of maintaining the white man's prestige. In native countries such as Burma, the white man absolutely had to maintain a superior position. For a white man to travel deck-passage among natives was bad; and, whenever possible, I gave the missionaries proper cabins in the first-class. The worthy men always showed themselves extremely grateful.

I carried other European passengers, who were far less idealistic.

There were drillers from some oil-fields, who let

themselves go very thoroughly on the ship. After being months at the oil-drilling plant without a spell away, the drillers' wages, which were very high in scale, were burning holes in their pockets. They drank, and kept on drinking; then, finally, got out their revolvers and began to shoot everything up. There was really nothing vicious about them; it was all merely horseplay.

It was distinctly disturbing, all the same. The revellers shot away the electric-light globes, and took pot-shots at trees and other objects on the shore as we steamed past. Like the Catholic missionaries, however, they were setting a bad example to the natives, and I had to stop things. The damage to the electric lights and the like didn't matter so very much; the drillers were quite willing to pay for them, anyway. But it was absolutely impossible to allow white men to behave in front of natives as if they were a lot of lunatics. We whites always liked to think that the natives regarded us as people of sanity and great wisdom.

The climax came when the promiscuous shooting threatened to become definitely dangerous to human life. One day one of the drillers raised his revolver, and took aim at a native smoking on deck. "Wa'ch me knock the ash off his cheroot," the man hiccupped. I had a most awful moment of fearing that he would fire before I could reach him. I covered in a single leap the couple of yards that separated us, and luckily my fingers fastened about the other's wrist just as he pulled the trigger. That native with the cheroot had about the narrowest escape he is ever likely to have in this life. My gripping of the driller's wrist caused the

revolver to fling up a bit, and the bullet went just over the native's head. I took the revolver away, and fortunately was able to persuade the man's companions either to deliver up their weapons also, or to put them away in their cabins.

There was another passenger, whom I found sitting at my right hand at table the morning after leaving one of the river stations. He was a little sharp-faced fellow with small eyes and a scrubby ginger moustache. He was rather loudly dressed, and wore a cloth cap. I looked at him in amazement. A man who came into breakfast wearing a cap was unusual, to say the least; but in addition to this, the person in question was occupying the seat which had been reserved for a new passenger, the Right Honourable Edward A. Casey. I had found the Honourable Casey's name in the passenger-list handed me by the shore people at the last station, and, as befitted his title, had allotted him the best cabin in the ship and the best place at table.

The rat-faced little fellow nodded at me perkily as I took my place at the table.

"Morning, Skipper!"

"Good morning," I said. "You'll excuse me, but I'm afraid there's been a mistake somewhere."

He gave me a quick glance out of his shrewd eyes.

"'Ow's that, Skipper?"

"You're in somebody else's seat. The place where you're sitting is reserved for the Right Honourable Edward Casey."

He gave a laugh.

"Well, then, Skipper, there hasn't been any

mistake. I'm the Right Honourable Casey himself!"

"You are?" I asked in astonishment.

He gave a brisk nod. "My name's Casey, all right; but when I was booking my passage in the shipping office I stuck the words 'Right Honourable' in front of it. It's a good idea, Skipper, and if you go travellin' as a passenger at any time, you ought to try it. Gives you the best place and the best cabins as easy as winkin'. I've been travellin' the East a good bit now, and they all fall for it.

"I'm travellin' in the canned provisions line," my informant ran on; and, whipping a price list out of his pocket, he leaned over to me and ran his finger down the items. "There y'are—corn' beef, roast beef, boiled mutton, roast mutton, pigs' trotters, sheeps' tongues, all in one-pound tins, at prices you couldn't beat nowhere. What about it, Skipper? You got any say in the provisionin' of this ship? Put the order through me and I'll see you right for a bit of rake-off. You'll make a tidy sum out of it, and nobody the wiser. Here y'are! Plum puddings, cake, fancy biscuits, all in pretty tins with pictures on them, and a general get-up that'd make any of these Burmese women fall for you like one thing. If you've got any leanings that way, of course—which I see perhaps you haven't, now I look at you again. You can forget that part of it, Skipper. Any'ow, the goods is all right, and the price can't be beat. It's a chance for you. Make hay while the sun shines, I say. What about it? Or, mebbe, you'd be interested in some first-class jewellery that I'm carrying as a side-line. I've

got a tie-pin that'd suit you just fine. Eighteen carat gold, and set with a pearl——"

The man ran on and on, and I hurried through my meal to escape him. Whereupon the would-be salesman turned to the passenger sitting on the other side of him—a grave and dignified judge—and recommenced his outpourings of patter all over again.

The situation was intolerable. However, it was not long before I found a means of ending it. Later in the day, watching my chance, I got into conversation with the fellow and drew him aside.

"Quite comfortable in that cabin of yours, Mr. Casey?" I asked.

The other nodded. "Most, Skipper! It's a damn' fine cabin."

"I'm glad to hear it," I said, and then lowered my voice. "Between ourselves, there's not many people who'd like to travel in that cabin. But, of course, you've knocked around a good deal, and——"

"Why, what's the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing; so long as you're satisfied it's all right."

I made to turn away, but the little man followed me.

"What's the mystery, Skipper? Something wrong with that cabin?"

For some moments I pretended to consider the matter gravely.

"I'm sorry I said anything about it," I answered at last. "But as you insist—well, the fact is that the last man who had that cabin suffered from leprosy."

My companion gave a gasp.

"Leprosy!" he echoed, his face suddenly grey. And, with a grave nod, I took my departure.

The result was that Casey promptly surrendered his cabin, and transferred to a much inferior one. Moreover, this giving up of the best cabin seemed to take the heat out of him, and he yielded also his place at my right hand, taking a seat with someone he had made friends with at the other end of the saloon. Actually, though, he was not nearly so clever a person as he thought he was. If he had stopped to think a moment, he would have known that lepers are not carried in first-class cabins. No doubt he found out in due course how he had been spoofed; but it was then too late for him to do anything about it.

Numerous and varied, too, were the passengers I met with during my other sea-farings up and down the world.

On one ship of which I was an officer, on the run from England to South America, there were a number of Russian emigrants—many of them women and girls. One of my duties was to inspect the women's quarters; and as we went through the tropics—well, you never saw such a sight! There was anything from eighty to a hundred women down there, all stark naked, lying round in their bunks, or sitting on the edge of them; women, fat and thin, old, young, greasy and sweaty. The whole place was positively draped with flesh. Passengers! They were more like mere human freight than anything else.

None of the women were the least embarrassed at my appearance. There was not even a self-

conscious giggle. Nudity *en masse* did not make for sex-consciousness, apparently. They simply sat there completely indifferent to everything, and might have been members of some nudist colony; though it was long before nudism, as we know it to-day, was thought of. There was something repellent about the sight of all that human flesh—maybe, because it was so wet with perspiration.

On another ship there was a parson passenger, who was very much the opposite of the Roman Catholic missionaries I have already described. This was on the run between the West Indies and England, and the man was homeward bound on leave. He came on board in his black coat and "dog collar," looking very much the parson indeed. I promptly put him down as uninteresting, and someone to be avoided. Soon after we left port, however, I found him on deck smartly dressed in non-clerical clothes. He asked me to have a drink with him, and we soon became friendly. He liked a drink, he told me, and good clothes, and all the best in life. I told him I thought he was a strange sort of parson; and he nodded and smiled.

"Why do you wear a uniform on this ship, Mr. Hyatt?" he asked. "It's just a part of earning your living, isn't it? Well, I wear my uniform—the black coat and clerical collar—in connection with earning *my* living. When I'm out of uniform I believe in enjoying myself, just as, no doubt, you believe in enjoying yourself when you are ashore and out of *your* uniform. That's all."

I liked that parson. His unorthodox attitude was refreshing; and so were his sermons at Sunday Service on board. One meets, particularly on ships

it would seem, so many mealy-mouthed clerics, that the very sight of them is enough to depress one. Perhaps it is because of this it is said that having parsons on board is liable to bring bad luck to a ship. I might mention that the frank views of my parson friend did not, strangely enough, hold him back from preferment; he is now one of the dignitaries of the Church.

Aboard ship on the Mediterranean run there was one very queer passenger, indeed. Everything about this personage was shrouded in mystery. His cabin, a deck one, was kept closed, and the port-holes were always covered by their curtains. The passenger came on board in the darkness of the night, and when, after three days, he reached his destination, he went ashore secretly in the middle of the night. As a matter of fact, only the Captain and the purser were present when, together with a manservant, the other came on board and at length disembarked again.

The thing intrigued us junior officers tremendously. From the fact that the mysterious one was attended by a manservant, we guessed his sex to be masculine. This manservant took his master his food—it was always the very best from the first-class menu—and looked after him in every way. Some of us tried to pump the servant, but without result; he was of the English butler type, and most uncommunicative. A rumour reached us that the hidden passenger was a person of title; but we didn't hear any more than that. We got a very definite impression, however, that the mystery so interesting to us was something altogether too horrifying to talk about.



SURVEYING LAND AT PORT NELSON DURING OPEN WATER SEASON, SIX WEEKS ONLY
Swampy ground anything up to four feet deep

[see page 197

WOOLWICH PUBLIC LIBRARIES.



THE PORT NELSON PARSON ON HIS ROUNDS

[see page 198]



HALF-BREEDS READY TO LEAVE PORT NELSON WITH
OUTGOING MAILS, A DISTANCE OF 400 MILES TO LE PAS

Note food on cache out of reach of prowling animals

[see page 206]

And then, late in the afternoon of the day before the unknown disembarked, I had a glimpse of him and learned that his secret certainly *was* altogether horrifying. There was a bit of a sea on, and owing to the rolling of the ship the curtain of one of the port-holes of the special cabin swung aside a little. The light of the cabin was switched on, and I caught a glimpse of the passenger. It was only a momentary glimpse, but it was quite enough. He had long ears, and a long face covered with close hair—the face of a horse. The passenger was a monstrosity!

Upon another occasion, when going my rounds on a ship, I became aware of an odour which presently I recognized as that of chloroform. Tracking down the odour, I found that it came from the cabin of one of the passengers, a young woman named Mrs. E——. The smell of the chloroform was very strong, and I telephoned to my superior officer on the bridge for instructions. He told me to knock on the door of the cabin, and if there was no response break the door in; being careful to have a watchman or someone else with me as a witness, in case I should be accused of unnecessarily forcing my way into a cabin. I knocked accordingly, and on receiving no reply broke the door down—to find the young woman occupant lying on her bunk with a towel saturated with chloroform over her face.

I opened the port-hole and turned on the fan, took away the towel and shook the young woman. I thought she was gone, and was greatly relieved when at last she came round. When she was able properly to speak, she explained that she had had

a raging toothache for some days, and had taken the chloroform to try and get some sleep.

It was a terribly thin explanation, and of course no one believed it. Mrs. E—— did not say where she had got the chloroform, and no one pressed her on the matter. Actually, she had stolen the stuff from the ship's dispensary, which she had entered on some pretext or other. Everyone was sorry for her. She was young and good-looking; and it was felt that life must have given her a rough spin to drive her into attempted suicide. We simply pretended to accept her explanation; and the matter was dropped.

Some two years later, quite by chance, I learned what had lain behind that incident in the cabin. As I was walking down a London street, I heard my name called, and turned to find a young woman with a smartly-dressed man beside her, and a bonny looking child. It was none other than Mrs. E—— of the chloroform episode, and her husband and kiddy. I met them several times afterwards, and bit by bit learned that at the time of her travelling on the ship Mrs. E—— had been sent on a sea-voyage, in the hope that it would restore her to health after a breakdown following the death of her first husband through an accident during their honeymoon. Nothing, however, seemed to assuage her grief; she had found life alone unendurable. Nevertheless, after her narrowly-averted suicide she had met her present husband, a ship's officer, on her way home. And as I looked at her there, with her bonny infant, I felt overwhelmingly glad that I broke down that cabin-door in the nick of time as I did.

Then there was a daughter of the King of Egypt, whom we took on board at Alexandria. She was on her way to Paris, to a finishing-school, and arrived on the ship in the full dress of an Egyptian royal lady. She was young, slim, and graceful, and altogether possessed of great charm; but her face was concealed by the *yashmak*, so that only her eyes showed. I was a junior officer in that particular ship, and we young fellows speculated a good deal among ourselves as to what her face was like. Some said she was good-looking, others the reverse. When you could see only a woman's eyes, said one, as was the case with most Egyptian women, she looked very mysterious and all that; but very often her face proved to be the very reverse of beautiful. We had bets about it, I remember, but the trouble was, how the bets were to be decided? That question exercised us a good deal.

As it turned out, our speculations were soon at an end. No sooner were we away from the coast of Egypt than the Princess shed her native costume, *yashmak* and all, and appeared in the most modish Paris and London styles. It was the pro-beauty bettors who won. The Princess was a beauty, with a capital B, and we fell for her, one and all. It wasn't often that we carried such a wonderful personage.

I am afraid, though, that any ideas I might have had of appearing at my best before our distinguished passenger were doomed to disappointment. This was due to a St. Bernard dog, which the Princess had brought aboard with her. He was a fine beast, big even for a St. Bernard, young

and very active. I was quite good friends with him, but one afternoon as I passed the place where he was chained up he leapt out towards me, as dogs are apt to do in their exuberance. The chain broke, and I turned and ran, with the great dog bounding after me. I had no doubt that he was only half-playing, but I wasn't in any mood for games with a great beast like that.

I raced along the deck and into a deck shelter. On seeing the pursuing dog, various people in the deck shelter promptly climbed up on to the tables. I tried to climb up after them, and it was then that the dog reached me. His great jaws fastened in my trousers and tore away the seat. While, of course, it was just at that moment that the Princess should choose to appear on the scene.

The Princess called the dog off, and the huge creature docilely trotted to her—a piece of my trousers in his mouth! With his great eyes upturned to hers and his tail wagging with pleasure, the St. Bernard laid the piece of trousers at his mistress's feet. It was as if he were a servitor bringing his royal mistress a tribute. . . .

Another time—this was on the run between Rangoon and Calcutta—there was a young woman passenger named Nora, daughter of an important Government official. Nora and I had fallen for one another rather badly, and took every opportunity of meeting and talking on the quiet. She was only about eighteen, had a great mass of bright auburn hair, and I thought she was very wonderful.

Sometimes on coming off duty, perhaps even as late as midnight, I used to have a little talk with

Nora through the port-hole of her cabin. To do this, I got quietly over the side of the ship on to a gangway that was drawn up there. It was one of those gangways which, when a vessel is lying out in a harbour, are let down the side of the ship so that one may have access to small craft, boats and launches for going to and from the shore, but at sea are hauled right up to a horizontal position just a little way below the level of the main deck. When it was in this horizontal position, the gangway was a somewhat precarious place on which to stand, for the steps were the wrong way up, and only their edges offered a foothold. But love laughs at risks, and I was quite content to crouch there in the darkness talking to my auburn-haired goddess through the port-hole.

One night, however, there was an abrupt end to my *tête-à-tête*. The ship was rolling rather heavily to a lazy swell, and as I crouched in my precarious position on the gangway, I slipped. For a moment I thought I was gone; but by the sheerest chance I was able to grab one of the stanchions of the gangway, and so save myself from dropping into the sea. Nora screamed. The sudden disappearance of my face from the port-hole was a terrible shock to her.

I scrambled back on to the gangway as quickly as I could, but by that time Nora had given the alarm: "man overboard!" I hurried on board in the darkness, and on reaching the deck darted below. Nora was just coming out of the door of her cabin, her auburn hair flying, her face white with shock. A watchman and the chief officer were hurrying towards her.

"Man overboard? Where? Who?" asked the chief officer.

"It's—" began Nora, and then she caught sight of me behind the others.

I was signalling frantically to her not to mention my name. I had had no business to be out on that gangway, and could very definitely get into trouble for it. Nora played up splendidly.

"It—it—was a native," she said; "a black man. He was looking through the port-hole into my cabin; and the ship rolled and he fell off into the sea. He was on that thing out there, the gangway——"

The officer grunted. "A native Peeping Tom!" He turned, and, finding me there, said:

"Oh, Mr. Hyatt, you haven't gone below yet? You might just nip along and count the native passengers, and find out which one's missing."

"Yes, sir," I said, and hurried away.

All this had taken only a few moments; but things were happening rapidly. Talk about an upset! I had never known before what a tremendous amount of truth there was in the lines:

Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive!

The ship was stopped. Boats were lowered. Lighted buoys were thrown overboard. The news spread like wildfire through the ship, and numbers of passengers appeared on deck.

There was a crabby old High Court Judge, I remember—a red-faced man resembling a Bateman colonel, even to the furious moustache, who stood

there in a dressing-gown of flaming red, peering across the midnight sea, asking everyone who passed him: "What's it all about? Eh? What, what? The ship seems to be stopped." There was also a missionary woman in a smart silk kimono and dinky sandals, who said, pointing: "There he is, over to the right of that boat! I can see his head quite plainly." Then, again, there was a chatty little man who informed all and sundry: "I heard him hit the water—splash, plonk, just like that! As plain as you like! As soon as I heard it I thought to myself: That's a man overboard! I wouldn't like to be him. Lots of sharks round here, I should imagine. I heard him give a kind of gurgle as he hit the water. Perhaps the sharks have got him already. They tell me it's only a native. But natives are human like the rest of us, aren't they? They've got their feelings, and all that. And all I say is, I hope they find the poor devil. This is not the first time when I've been on a ship when a man's gone overboard. I remember. . . ."

Meanwhile I had made a pretended count of the natives, and reported there was none missing. To the Captain and others the affair began to assume a mysterious aspect; and when, after the better part of an hour, with the ship encircling the spot, and the lifeboats out all the time, there was no sign of the missing man, it was decided to abandon the search. With no sign of a man in the water, not even a loin-cloth or other piece of clothing, and no sign on board of anyone being missing, it was decided at last that perhaps the young lady of the auburn hair had made a mistake. I heard many remarks later to the effect that a

capacity for imagining events of a somewhat neurotic nature was a characteristic of some adolescent young women.

One other girl passenger I encountered comes strongly to my mind. She was Spanish, with a mixture of some dark blood, and she was seventeen years old. With her mother and three younger sisters she came on board at Rio de Janeiro, on a trip to Europe. The father was a merchant with large interests in South America, and immensely wealthy. The mother was a heavy, high-bosomed woman, with a greasy complexion, always overdressed and overpowdered, and with too many rings on her fingers. In certain lights her dark blood was very pronounced, and she looked particularly gross. The daughters, however, did not take after her—especially the eldest. That seventeen-years-old girl had all the grace of her Spanish forbears. She had long, jet-black hair, and lovely dark eyes. Her taste in dress and ornament was quite good. A great deal of time and money had been spent on her education and bringing up generally.

It was the mother's ambition to marry her eldest daughter to a white man; and it was there that I came into the picture. The mother decided that I would be the very man for the part. I was only twenty-two years old, and the designing parent evidently thought my career was a promising one. Incidentally, for my part I was very taken by the whole idea. As the ship ploughed her way up from South America towards England, I thought it all seemed wonderful. I felt that I was made, and I lived in an atmosphere of glamour and romance. Even the girl's name—which, translated, was

Sucking-Pig; yes, Miss Sucking-Pig, absurd as it may seem!—didn't put me off.

Nevertheless, once arrived in England, things appeared very differently. Away from that setting of shipboard nights, and with the South American background far away, there was no romance left at all. In response to a pressing invitation, I called on the girl and her mother and sisters at the fashionable Piccadilly hotel where they were staying. I was glad when at last the time came for me to go. Sitting there with them, I had horrible visions of the girl losing her beauty and growing up into a replica of her heavy and greasy-skinned mother. I envisioned myself as the father of a lot of children with coloured blood in them. When I left them I knew I would never see Miss Sucking-Pig again.

CHAPTER X

MEN WITH FILED TEETH

AFTER Burma, the next scene of striking adventure that I knew was Nigeria, West Africa. I was appointed assistant beach-master at Burutu, on one of the innumerable streams which make up the delta of the Niger River. It was a dreary sort of place, too! Almost everywhere were mangroves, forty or fifty feet high, and thick-growing as a jungle, and for miles upon miles the numberless creeks flowed sluggishly through them. It was only here and there that you came to solid ground, and usually only small patches at that.

But Burutu was an important place, none the less. It was one of the Niger ports for the Elder Dempster Shipping Co., the British and African Co., and the African Trading Co. There were landed goods for transshipment into river craft for up-country; there also was the rubber and other produce of the country loaded into outward-bound vessels. There were half a dozen of us whites, and we lived in a large bungalow, built high off the ground on a brick structure, in the lower portion of which were our offices and the like. The beach-master's and my job was supervising the handling of the various cargoes. Our staff consisted of some six hundred native wharf-workers.

And what a crowd those natives were! They

had shiny black skins covered with cicatrices, and had their teeth filed to resemble saws. They had a great capacity for perspiring. You would think that natives born in a tropical country would be accustomed to the heat, but in this case it was not so. A crowd of new-chum white men wouldn't have perspired more than did many of those Africans. The sweat poured off them until they positively steamed.

Then, too, there was the question of smell! Of all the unpleasantly high odours in the world, commend me to that produced by a gang of some hundreds of blacks at work on a wharf in the heart of a mangrove swamp. It is an occasion when one instinctively seeks an up-wind position. Natives declare, however, that Europeans omit an odour most offensive to *them*; so perhaps I had better not say too much about this matter.

We had to watch the natives very carefully. They were always ready to help themselves, when they could, from the cargoes. This was particularly so when we were landing liquor. Those wharf labourers of ours would do anything for liquor, and the drunken white man who sells up his home for drink wasn't in it with them.

I remember an occasion when we had a large number of cases of gin to bring ashore from a vessel beside the wharf. We put a long string of men on to this particular job, and each man carried a case of spirit on his head. In order to keep the workers going at a regular pace, we had a man beating time with a tom-tom or drum. There was thus no time for a man to stop and extract a bottle from a case. In time to the beating of the drum,

the line of bearers extended from the ship into the go-down, where they left their cases and returned to the ship once more.

But now and again one of the natives would defeat us, all the same. Whenever he got a chance a man would slip the case quickly from his head, give it a sharp bang on the ground, and thus break a bottle inside. Then he would lift the case on his head again, so adjusted that at least some of the contents of the broken bottle would run down his face and into his mouth.

I saw one fellow perform quite a remarkable feat of head-balancing as, in time to the beating of the gong, he jogged along. In order that it might serve as a kind of gutter he had the corner of the case immediately over his forehead, and his eyes were upturned, watching the trickling stream of liquor. The native swayed this way and that, not so much balancing the case as trying to guide the gin down on to his nose, and thence on to his tongue. The great width of the man's negroid nose made quite a good runnel, and his protruding tongue had an upward curve. One hand held the case in position on his head, and his other hand was cupped and striving to catch any drops that missed his tongue. He might have been a devotee practising a strange rite.

Sometimes fights would break out among the workers. This occurred usually, not in working hours, but in their time off—perhaps when sitting around, smoking and talking, and everything seemed entirely peaceful. Suddenly two natives would flare up about something.

There was, however, very little quarrelling about

women, or anything romantic like that. To the Africans' way of looking at it, women were not worth fighting about. Women were very inferior creatures. In journeying through the bush, a man always made his wife precede him. Thus, should an enemy suddenly appear, it would be the woman who would first receive the attack. In this respect those natives were certainly believers in "Ladies first!"

Nearly all the disputes were about money—borrowings or stealings, and one fight that I saw might have been between two wild animals. I have seen a good deal of fighting between men, but never a conflict like that. The combatants used neither fists nor weapons, but their teeth—those dreadful teeth that, both upper and lower, were filed into the semblance of saws, and were exceedingly sharp. As the fighters bared them in the flush of anger, the effect was to make the men look more non-human than ever.

The contestants flung themselves at one another with their mouths open. They drove in their teeth where they could, but aimed at one another's faces. When a man got a grip, he shook his head like a dog. They tore pieces out of one another, until blood spurted and gushed. Each man was soon covered with his opponent's blood as well as his own, and the mouths of both dripped horribly red. All the time they snarled and slavered, and generally it was an appalling spectacle of ferocity.

The onlooking crowd of natives yelled encouragement to the fighters, and some women among them were quite as excited as the men. One woman had a child perched on her shoulder, in order to

give it a better view. The child was a round-stomached little fellow, who had a tight grip of his mother's hair to help maintain his position, and he joined in the shouting as lustily as the rest. Other children peered in from about the legs of the adults.

The fight finally stopped only when the two antagonists were unable to continue. It was, therefore, I suppose, what we should call a draw. Blood-stained and torn, the two men suddenly separated and staggered away. It was the sort of fight that couldn't have gone on for very long, anyway.

Again, those West African people often displayed the most abominable cruelty. I once thought I was "seeing things," when, one morning I was confronted by the nasty spectacle of two featherless chickens running about at the back of our living quarters. On making inquiries, I learned that the birds were for our evening meal, and for some culinary reason of his own the native cook had plucked them alive. . . . I soon put a stop to the dreadful practice.

We had a trading store at Burutu; to which numbers of natives from up the river and round about came with rubber, ivory, nuts, and other produce. Many were real savages, and carried bows and poisoned arrows. Their faces were rough and primitive. At Burutu, of course, they had to behave themselves; but it would not have been too safe for any of us whites to wander far into their country. In fact, it was impressed upon us by the authorities that we should keep as much as possible to our own immediate district.

Trading was principally by barter. Those natives knew very little about money, but if they did receive money in payment for their goods, they insisted that the coins should not be those which had on them the head of Queen Victoria. They suspected such coins, and regarded them not as real money at all. It was impossible, they declared, that the ruler of the white men—the great white men—should be a woman! Women were of no account. No; the real coins could only be those which had a *man's* head on them—the head of the king.

As at that period there was still plenty of Queen Victoria's coinage in circulation, the official in charge of the trading-store had quite a lot of difficulty in that respect. Incidentally, we met with the same trouble when we paid our wharf-workers. I have never been in a place where English coinage was so suspect.

Trading by barter, on the other hand, was much more satisfactory. The store was a large place, containing an astonishing variety of goods; not unreminiscent, indeed, of a modern Woolworth's. There was scented hair-oil, mouth-organs, imitation jewellery, tobacco, salt (salt was in great demand by natives from up-country, and so keen on it were they, that often you would see them start licking it as soon as they obtained it), sweets, clothes—the Lord only knows what else.

The trading natives were very keen on clothes, and the store had a good stock from which to supply them. Among stock were uniforms of all kinds; the natives having a lust for uniform—or even parts of them. In the store we had uniforms of postmen, policemen, firemen, bandsmen—all old cast-off

stuff, of course, gathered together from second-hand dump stores in England and elsewhere. The finery, however, all looked very fine and attractive to the natives, and an hour after a canoe-full of natives had arrived with a quantity of rubber and produce for barter, you would see them completely transformed. One would be an admiral, cocked-hat and all; another a much-braided bandsman. One fellow might have on a frock coat and tall hat; and if the trousers were missing, it didn't worry him in the least. Still another might have on a pair of spats and high choker collar, with only a dirty scrap of loin cloth in between. I recall one fellow stalking around proudly in a pair of imitation gold spectacles with no glass in them, a single white spat, and about his middle a shell that was far more revealing than concealing. He hadn't another scrap of clothing on him.

The women, for their part, "bought" quantities of cheap calico to make dresses, or to tear into ribbons to hang from their arms. The children, in common with their kind the whole world over, got all sticky with sweets. Some of the more ambitious of the men traded their goods for bicycles, alarm-clocks and mosquito-nets; these last being made of hessian or cheese-cloth, the close mesh of which was the only one calculated to keep out mosquitoes in a country that was absolutely infested with them.

For some hours, then, the native traders would hang around the place—a queerly-dressed crowd, engaged in admiring one another's costumes and their own. Now and then there would be temporary exchanges of clothing, to see which kind

suited particular individuals best. Until, slowly and reluctantly, the natives would set off on the journey back to their home; taking with them the white man's civilization, as represented by strange-looking postmen, bandsmen, admirals and what-not, into the heart of the bush.

It was one of the great events of our lives when a big ship came in—an Elder Dempster boat, say, from England. European passengers, bound up-country, would come ashore to tranship into the river steamers, and for an hour or two the white population of Burutu would thus be increased perhaps several times. With these extra whites about, the place seemed oddly unfamiliar and out of its stride, so to speak.

There would be a white woman or two among the new arrivals, perhaps. White women! We'd almost forgotten what they looked like, and I know that I, for one, found it hard not to stare, with seeming rudeness, at any such passenger. After seeing only black women for so long, one thought a young white woman quite wonderful. Hitherto some of the black women had seemed presentable enough. One appreciated their grace of carriage—that grace which comes to all bearers of head-burdens—their suppleness, their respectful bearing towards us as white men. One ignored somewhat their blackness, the coarseness of their figures, the ugly cicatrices with which they disfigured their skin.

But in the presence of a young white woman, daintily clad in muslin, coming along the wharf with a pretty parasol over her head, clear-skinned and speaking a European tongue—well, I ask you! The civilized note of her white shoes made the great

wide, black feet of the native women look by comparison like ill-kept frying-pans. It was all a matter of comparison. Actually, of course, white women such as I glimpsed on the wharf at Burutu didn't prove to be so very wonderful when later I met them in England. Instead of beautiful, most of them appeared very ordinary indeed.

Sunday was a great "day off." We took things absolutely easy. We sat around any old how and dressed in similar fashion. We looked like the fellows in the play "White Cargo." Pyjamas and topees were our usual attire. We played billiards and cards, told yarns (the strength of the impulse among isolated men to tell yarns is astonishing), put on the gramophone, had drinks, slept a lot, and consumed a large meal of "palm oil chop." This is a food made by natives, an extraordinary mixture of meat, vegetables, oil, and I know not what else, most highly spiced. It meant to us what highly-spiced curry means to Europeans in India.

One Sunday there was a nasty episode. The victim of the occurrence was a white man who had strayed over from one of the steamers. He was a big lump of a chap—over fifteen stone in weight—but with an unfortunate capacity for getting drunk on a very small quantity of liquor. I say "unfortunate" advisedly. In such places as Nigeria a man who can't stand liquor should leave it alone altogether. There's no half-way about that rule.

A couple of whiskies was enough to make this fellow drunk, but we didn't know it at the time. The result was that the man had soon taken more than was good for him, and began to behave in a very silly manner. One of the things that he took

it into his head to do was to slide down the handrail of the stair leading from our living-quarters to the concrete ground-floor below, and before we had realized what the fellow was up to, he had done it. He got on to the banister at the top, lay along it, head foremost, and let himself go. He slid down the whole length of the banister at full speed, and shot off at the end full on to his face along the concrete—the whole fifteen stone of him! When we picked him up his face presented a simply ghastly spectacle. Not only was it smashed and broken, but his forehead had been scraped down over his nose. He survived, but no one would have recognized him afterwards.

Another visitor we had was a man who had been many years in Nigeria, and was just back from a trip to England. We thought to hear something about the home country, of the other's experiences there during his holiday, and so on. But, instead, all that we heard was of an occurrence at Sierra Leone—the country near Nigeria—where our companion had called on his way back. For the time being all his experiences in England were as nothing compared with what had happened to him at Sierra Leone. He was furiously angry about it. He was an Englishman of the old pioneer type, and his story—leaving out the worst of the expletives—went as follows:

“Hell, but things are rapidly going to pot in Africa! What do you think of this, eh? I went ashore at Sierra Leone. I didn't like the look of the place. Niggers everywhere. That's nothing, of course; there's niggers everywhere in Nigeria, too. But there in Sierra Leone they were different—

damn' different. As I walked along they didn't trouble to get out of my road. By hell, they didn't! And me a white man, mind you! Well, I went to the post office, to get some stamps. There was a queue of niggers waiting to get to the counter. I pushed past 'em, naturally. And then, what do you think?

"The coon behind the counter shouts out to me: 'Hey, you; get back there!'

"I glared at him, hardly able to believe my ears. 'Are you talking to me, you black bastard?' I said.

" 'Yes,' he answered back, though without disputing that he was what I called him. 'You got to take yuh place in the line like any other man.'

"And the line of niggers all grunted and looked at me, scowling. I felt like wading in among them. But what was a fellow to do? Another second, and I would have started a real shindy there in that post office. But I controlled myself. I did that. I ought to get a medal for it. I walked out and left them to it. Talk about beggars on horseback—it ought to be *niggers* on horseback! That's what comes of all this talk of men being equal, and so much missionary palaver. The niggers of Sierra Leone have been given a sort of free hand—and this is what comes of it. Bah! You ought to have seen the self-satisfied looks on their bloody black faces for putting it across me like that in their post office!"

The narrator went on and on like that, utterly obsessed by the subject, and the memories of his holiday in England completely in the background for the time being. He was an example of race consciousness *in excelsis*.

There were "characters," too, among the tiny party of us who lived at Burutu.

One was a man with a flair for native girls. He was quite an expert on them, and with great gusto and freedom would discuss the merits of one as opposed to those of another. Back in England he might have been described as a "ladies' man." At Burutu he had a native wife, whom he had bought from her father. The price he had paid was £2 in cash and two bottles of whisky; which he described as being "not actually dear when you consider everything." He paid this black wife of his thirty shillings a month, and kept her in food. She was rather a pleasant-faced creature for a native, and in a rough sort of fashion took quite good care of her white husband.

This native girl picked up some English from her lord and master, but English much besprinkled with shocking words which she thought were merely ordinary forms of emphasis. It was queer to hear her, in her stumbling English, putting oaths into an ordinary remark in the most casual manner. It was like listening to a small child swearing—swearing foully. I recollect the look of pained astonishment which appeared on a missionary's face when she spoke to him thus.

There was no mission influence near Burutu, and this missionary was a new arrival to the country, transshipping from the English mail-steamer to the up-river boat. He was a pink young man, with a sanctimonious voice and manner. He referred to the wharf-labourers and others as "the deah natives," and in speaking to them called them "my deah brothers." Very few

of them knew what he meant, for their knowledge of English was strictly limited; but the man's intimate manner astonished them, none the less. They probably thought the white man was a little wrong in the head. Then he noticed our own white man's young native wife. She was better dressed than the other women, and somewhat cleaner-looking.

"Ah! You look as though you have been to a mission at some *taime*," the missionary greeted the girl, smiling benignly.

The girl shook her head.

"No bloody fear, master," she responded simply.

The missionary started as if something had stung him. "*What* did you say?"

The girl thought he hadn't heard her; or, perhaps, she feared that her small knowledge of English was at fault. Speaking very slowly and distinctly, and with eyes downcast from shyness at being in the presence of a white man, she said:

"No—(awful word)—mission near this—(two even worse words)—place, master."

The missionary fled, almost before the sentence was finished. He had, he feared, made a terrible mistake. It was very evident that the young woman had *not* been to a mission.

This girl's husband was a staunch believer in black wives, as opposed to white ones. He'd tried 'em both, he said.

Back in England he'd had a wife once. Yes. He'd been engaged to her two years before they got married. Each wanted to make sure of what the other was like. Careful, see! And while they were engaged they got on fine. But after they'd

been married a year or two it was different. She tried to run the show, him included. It grew to be just plain hell. It was funny how marriage could alter a person. There used to be a song in those times that went:

I picked a lemon in the garden of love,
Where they say only peaches grow.

Yes; he'd picked a lemon all right. In the end he cleared out, and here he was in Africa, where he'd been ever since.

"With a native wife it's all different," the fellow went on. "A native wife is obedient and respectful, and looks upon her white husband as a bit of a god. She's grateful for any little present you might give her, and she don't always want to be going out and dashing about and attending bargain sales. No; nor ticking you off when you've had 'one over the eight.' No, sir! A man possesses his black wife; she doesn't possess him as so many white women do *their* husbands, poor devils! . . ."

In spite of the instructions that it was not safe to wander far from our own district, I used to travel about quite a bit in my spare time. The rivers all around were infested with crocodiles, and I used to go out shooting them. A crocodile is difficult to kill; the bullet has to take him under the shoulder or in the eye, otherwise as like or not, it will glance harmlessly off. A crocodile's hide is like armour-plate. You can hear the bullets smack against it very often. Most times all that happens is that the saurian gives a flick of his tail and a twist of his body and plunges into the water.

I am a pretty good rifle shot, but I'm afraid my bag of crocodiles was never a very big one.

On some of those crocodile hunts I did quite a bit of walking among the mangroves. One such journey was from one river to another, where a boat was waiting for me, and occupied several hours.

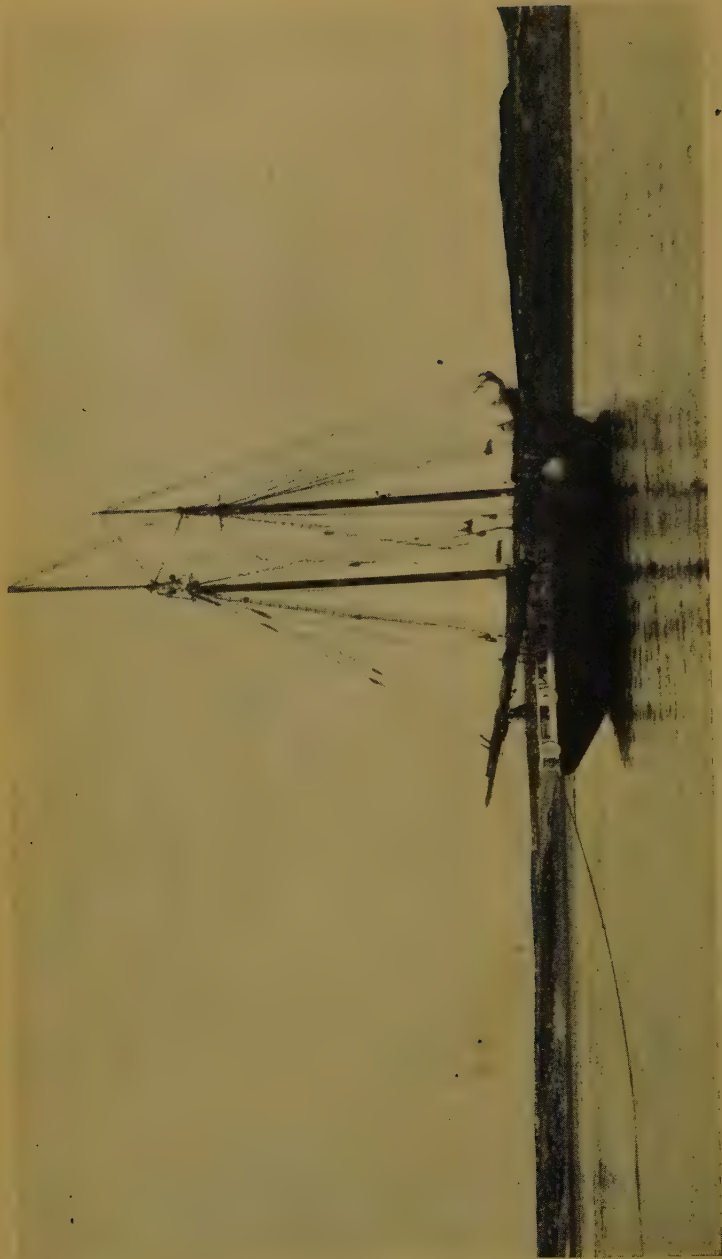
It was a most unpleasant journey. There was not a speck of dry land anywhere, and it was a matter of stepping from one mangrove root to another. The roots were curved like loops, and stood up above the water to the height of one's knees, and higher. The couple of natives I had with me stepped easily and quickly from one root to another, their toes gripping the hoops. But with me, in boots, it was another matter. I constantly slipped and fell. I had to hold on to the trees to steady myself. I repeatedly slipped off a root into knee-deep water. The water, sluggish and dark, stank abominably of dead vegetation.

There was slime everywhere about the roots; and slimy creatures crawled about them. Now and again there would be a splash as a crocodile entered the water somewhere near by; or it might have been the dropping of a rotten limb. In each case the sound gave one a start. So thick was the overhead foliage that the whole place was wrapped in gloom; my two natives were mere shadows in a world of vague shadows.

I was glad indeed when at last we got through. Also, the silence of it all impressed one as being curiously unreal. I was told that even the natives do not care for such places, and that nothing would induce them to traverse them after dark. At night,



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HUDSON BAY (at entrance to Baker Lake)

[see page 227]

it was said, they were the haunts of evil spirits.

On another of my excursions, in the vicinity of one of the native villages, I was startled by a sudden movement in the bush near by. I had my rifle with me, and I swung it round, ready for whatever might happen. I had no business to be in the vicinity of that village at all. Then, as I stood there, keeping perfectly still, I had a glimpse of something red. A moment later a native came into view. He had not seen me, and I took care to make no sound.

The native was very young, a mere boy—and painted red all over. He was wearing a small wicker adornment, but otherwise was entirely naked. He looked like some timid young animal. I kept absolutely motionless, so as not to frighten the other away. Presently I glimpsed a second red-painted boy, but at the same moment the second boy glimpsed me. He gave me a startled look, then uttered a low warning cry to his companion. Like a flash the two of them disappeared into the bush.

I had stumbled upon that which I had no business to see. They were two boys who had lately undergone the operation of circumcision, and had to remain in the bush, hidden from the sight of mankind, till the operation wounds were healed. I did not know what might happen to those two boys for having been seen by me, but I did know that it was expedient to beat a retreat, which I promptly did. I was in a region where at any moment a poisoned arrow might have come flicking through the trees.

Yet once again, in the course of my wanderings, I came to a ju-ju house. I had a friend with me,

and we decided to see if it were possible to have a look inside the place. It was a grass-thatched building, in a clearing by itself in the bush, some distance from the nearest village, and there was no sign of natives about. Accordingly, we cautiously approached and crept in through what passed for a doorway.

The interior was dark—there seemed to be no windows of any kind—and it was some time before we could see. Then, as we grew accustomed to the gloom, we made out near us, occupying a central position in the house, a large drum. It was made of wood, stood on short legs, and from one end there projected a carving in the likeness of the head and neck of some such animal as a cow. Other drums lay about. There were also what appeared to be imitations of railway signals—strange objects to find in a country where the nearest railroad was a long distance away indeed. How the very idea of such things originated, I do not know; nor can I give any indication as to their use. The ju-ju house contained many other articles—head-dresses, ceremonial clothing, feathers dipped in blood, and various weapons, and smelt of closeness and damp. The atmosphere, too, was oddly quiet. I had a very distinct feeling of uneasiness, and later when we compared notes I found that my companion had had a similar feeling.

At last we crept out, and we were quite glad to be in the sunlight and the open air once more. Using some twigs as a brush, we carefully obliterated our tracks leading to and from the ju-ju house, and then we went away.

But the natives learned of our visit, none the

less. Perhaps there had been a guard somewhere in the bush near by, who had spied on us. We heard rumours that bad things would happen to us for our intrusion upon forbidden ground; like the rest of black Africa, Nigeria is riddled with belief in sorcery. We took no notice of that sort of thing, of course. Yet, though I do not recall anything drastic or unusual happening to my companion in the adventure, I must say that a very peculiar experience duly came my way.

It concerned a pet monkey that I had. This little fellow used to sit and play upon a small platform-like structure extending from the balcony of our living-quarters. One day, for no apparent reason, the monkey tumbled off this platform to the ground, some fifteen feet below. The fall so injured the creature that I had to have him destroyed. I felt my loss very keenly, and it was an open belief among the natives that the sorcerer of the village whose ju-ju house I had entered had, by his magic, caused the monkey to fall in order to cause me grief. This may have been mere arrant nonsense, or it may not. All I can say is that in view of the remarkable agility, sureness of foot, and tenacity of grip possessed by his kind, there was something devilishly unnatural about that death of my tiny pet.

CHAPTER XI

BLACKWATER AND DYNAMITE

THE months passed quickly enough at Burutu. I was coming to like the West African life very well, and would have been content to stay on in the country for a considerable time to come. In spite of its many and obvious disadvantages, the place had its fascination. Then one day I was asked to take a vessel away up the Niger; to some mines at a point beyond Lokoja, a total distance of some two hundred and fifty miles. The vessel was a small stern-wheeler, called the *Yola*, and her cargo was several tons of gelignite, dynamite, detonators and blasting powder—explosives for the mines.

My journey, therefore, was by no means in the nature of a pleasure-trip. If there's anything calculated to keep a man's nerves on the jump, it's running a vessel loaded with explosives. And that is particularly the case when you have a native crew; natives are infernally careless with fire and matches; and will sit around smoking right in the midst of explosives.

One of the most hair-raising experiences of my life was an occasion when I had a number of natives as hands on a barge loaded with barrels of blasting powder, some of them leaking. I saw the men repeatedly drop cigarette butts in the immediate vicinity of the leaking powder-barrels.

At other times I've seen natives let fall cases of detonators—fulminate of mercury detonators, mind you, which need a surprisingly small jolt to send them off! Nor were warnings of the slightest use. The moment one's back was turned, the offenders were at it again, with their smoking and dangerous carelessness. It was a matter in which they seemed to have no "savvy" at all.

Well, there I was with the *Yola* loaded up with explosives, and a long up-river trip before me. But that was not my only trouble. For a day or so I had not been feeling very well. This rather surprised me, as I am a remarkably healthy man; and though this was "Wesht Africa, the white mansh grave," as an intemperate acquaintance of mine put it, I had had no great fear that *I* would be a victim. Nevertheless, my head ached and my stomach seemed all upset, and though I did everything I could I seemed to get no better. At last I said to myself: "Oh, to the devil with it! I'll be all right later on," and away we went.

The first part of the journey was along the Forcados River. The river is one of the Niger delta streams on which Burutu was built, and is a winding stream of varying width, edged mostly by mangroves. The days were bright and clear, as only Equatorial days know how to be. The stern-wheel made a bright boiling of the water; the chug-chugging a soft echoing among the trees. Now and then a puff of wind sent creases along the surface of the river. It was all very pleasant and encouraging, and, having taken a dose of medicine, I felt that maybe the sickness would soon pass off.

At last I came to the Niger, the river proper, and

the real journey up-stream was begun. Because she was loaded with explosives, the ship flew a red flag—a monster banner, sixteen feet square. It could be seen from a long way off, and stood out with strange sharpness against the green of the foliage about the bank. The idea, of course, was to warn other craft. Actually, however, in some cases, it only served to bring them closer, in order to discover what we were.

Native canoes, long dug-outs, many with half-round awnings like half-decks, were intensely curious. The crews paddled or poled out into the stream, their eyes staring at the great red flag. Perhaps they thought we were some kind of trading craft, and the red flag was a symbol of abundant red calico, a cloth they greatly desired. Usually one person in the canoes was constantly baling; the vessels seemed to be always leaking. There were men, women and children on board, their clothing exceedingly scanty; and sometimes a chicken or two perched on the edge of the craft. From cooking places smoke trickled up, and cooking utensils lay about. It was only after my crew shouted threateningly at them, that the canoes went away. I have no doubt that their inmates thought we were something of a fraud.

On and up that great river we went. We came to islands and sandbanks, some with ibis and pelicans on them. Here and there on the banks were vultures, hunched and unhappy-looking. Always on any beaches or low banks that we came to were crocodiles—not just one or two, but twenty or thirty at a time. At the sound of our stern-wheel, the brutes would slip hurriedly into the water.

Towards evening in some places numbers of large bats appeared. In Australia these creatures are called "flying foxes." As bats, they were really enormous, having a wing-spread of perhaps two feet. At night they hung from tree branches, one bat hanging on to another, till they were in a long line like a chain. In flight they were peculiarly soundless, and this quality gave them an eeriness that was all their own. A Fijian I once met told me that in his country flying foxes were held to be the embodied spirits of still-born children, and that the trees where they hung were held sacred in consequence.

That night my sickness grew worse. I spent much of the time in bringing up quantities of green bile, my head ached as I had never thought a head could ache, and I was running a fine old temperature. In the morning I was worse, and it was only by tremendous effort that I could give what orders had to be given. I said to myself: "Here's a mess! The ship full of explosives and me seedy like this!" I managed, nevertheless, to stagger round somehow. Though I was very ill it hadn't dawned on me that I was attacked by that dread disease which has caused West Africa to be known as the white man's grave—blackwater fever.

The ship went steadily on. I lay most of the time on the upper deck, the only place where I could be with any degree of comfort. Comfort, did I say? Beneath me, on the lower-deck, was the boiler; in front of me was the funnel; overhead the Equatorial sun was beating down relentlessly through the awnings. The little puffs of wind, which had been like cooling breaths earlier in the

journey, had gone. The surface of the river was a mirror reflecting the sun's great heat. And as if that wasn't enough, there was the fire in my blood of my increasing temperature.

Yet again, there were innumerable mango flies, which came darting about the deck. They were striped or speckled creatures larger than blue-bottles, and they nipped pieces out of the flesh of whoever they attacked instead of merely stinging. The natives used switches in vain endeavours to keep the pests away, and the man at the wheel had constantly to beat them off. Indeed, the steersman had to devote as much of his attention to them as to his job, and every now and again he would give a yell as a fly pounced on him from behind, digging into his shoulders. Those terrible mango flies were continually darting at me as I lay there on the deck. I had a native whose duty was to try and swish the creatures off, but they eluded him only too often. I was bitten about the face, neck, chest and hands. I had no real strength for repelling the flies myself, and they took full advantage of my condition. They were in very truth, my terrible enemies.

Life rapidly became almost unendurable. I am no morbid hypochondriac; I am a lover of life. But there on that ship, going up that river, there came a time when I thought seriously of suicide.

Staggering aft, I looked down at the flow and bubble of the water round the sternwheel. It looked cool—ever so cool. I was on fire, and to be cool seemed like heaven. I gazed down at that stern-wheel water, and could not tear my eyes away. I imagined myself in that foaming wash, laved by

it, rolled over by it—*cooled* by it. I didn't want to live, if living meant going on as I had been doing. Life simply wasn't worth the suffering; nothing was worth it. The temptation to jump over the side and let myself drown was almost a compulsion. It would be such an easy thing to do. . . . Why should I continue to suffer, when the end of it all was so easy . . . ? How I resisted I do not quite know. I have a vague recollection of the chief native on board—the *serang*, a very intelligent man—standing anxiously at my side. Perhaps it was he who finally enticed me away from such a dangerous spot.

I had frequent attacks of delirium. In many of them the exaggerations of fancy and the hard facts of reality were queerly mixed. Always at the back of my mind was the knowledge that the ship was full of explosives. I wondered sometimes if, after all, the vessel *had* blown up, and I was dead. I might, I felt, very easily be in Hell. That persuasion that I might be no longer of this world came to me again and again. At other times everything seemed to swing and sway. Odd fancies were born in me that the shiny surface of the river was the sky; or else that the low banks as they slipped past were high mountain peaks. Everything was certainly topsy-turvy!

In some parts of the river local native children were accustomed to paddle and play about in the water. Those spots were evidently more or less free from crocodiles, otherwise the children would not have been allowed there. None the less, there were always one or two people beating the water with poles to scare off any crocodiles should they

chance to appear. Many of the children had large gourds which they pushed out into the water and then lay down on top of them. The gourds were most buoyant, supporting the children quite easily, and their riders appeared rather comic as they paddled themselves along.

But to my distorted senses those things were absolute horrors. I saw them as a number of dreadful sea-monsters, splashing around in the water. Only for a brief second would my eyes focus properly, so that I saw the children and their mounts in true proportions. After that the gourds and their riders would swell to treble their size, come surging up to me, then recede and come surging up again; till at last I would shut my eyes and wearily turn away my head, unable to bear the vision any longer. And all the while the sound of the villagers' poles, beating the water to scare away the crocodiles, sounded like a huge drum echoing in my very brain; added to which there was the somewhat similar sound of the stern-wheel itself.

In the same fashion the vultures and ibises became distorted to my vision, and towards evening when the flying foxes were sighted they seemed of a terrible eeriness indeed. The silent movement of the bats' wings in the dusk was the essence of the uncanny. We were near the shore and, as they flew about the ship, I could see their nasty little eyes and tawny mouse-like skins. While, lying there, I had a queer feeling that as they flew they looked at me—creatures of ill-omen if ever there were!

In this way, then, I made my slow progress up

the river. At length I was compelled to put the *serang* in charge. I had reached the condition when I could do nothing but just recline there on the deck, and almost my only movements were when I brought up further quantities of green bile. In between my bouts of delirium thoughts came to me of the explosive cargo, and the carelessness of natives in connection with it. But such were only shadow-thoughts, so to speak; in the background of my consciousness. I was too weak to care very much at that point whether I lived or died. That *serang* was a reliable man and managed his job very well. God knows what would have happened to the outfit but for him. Taking that vessel along was no sinecure; there were all kinds of dangers. Apart from the risk of the whole show being blown up, there were shoals and rocks and shifting sandbanks to be avoided. One had also to see that the shore natives, coming off in canoes, didn't get up to mischief. Many of the river-side tribes were extremely treacherous.

The *serang* was desperately anxious to get me to the doctor at Lokoja. The man was greatly afraid that I might die there on the ship. As I learned later, he had been quick to recognize that I was suffering from the dread blackwater fever, from which so very few white men recover, and wanted me to have all the medical skill and attention possible. Yes; he was a good fellow, that *serang*.

At last we reached Lokoja, and I was rushed ashore and into hospital. Someone else took the little stern-wheeler with her cargo of explosives to the mines. My nightmare journey, however, came

to an end in the nick of time. Had I reached Lokoja even another hour later it might have been too late.

I was the only white patient in the hospital, and the doctor (Major Adams, of the West African Medical Service), and the nursing sister put up a great fight to save me. More than once it seemed that everything would be of no avail, and the next few minutes my last. So few blackwater patients ever recovered; and mine was a particularly bad case. Indeed, at one point the minister was sent for, and the nurse, writing to catch the infrequent mail, wrote to my parents in England informing them she was very much afraid that by the time they received the letter I would be no more. As it turned out, before my parents received that letter I was able to send them a cable announcing my recovery.

After I had turned the corner and begun to improve, I was in due course more or less my old self again. I have a theory—and it is not held by me alone—that blackwater fever is a form of quinine poisoning. In common with the rest of the fellows down at Burutu, I had been compelled to take considerable quantities of quinine as a safeguard against malaria. The quinine had been administered to us by the doctor of a Government post up the river some way from Burutu, and he had given it mostly in the form of injections. This was because the doctor knew that if given in tabloid form the stuff was as often as not thrown away. "Get rid of *that* dose—if you can!" the doctor would say, as he squirted the syringe full of quinine into our veins. I am sure, nevertheless, that

excessive quantities of quinine in the system help to set up blackwater fever. Certainly, the coincidence of excessive quantities of quinine and the fever is too striking to be lightly dismissed.

That attack of blackwater fever meant the end of my experiences in Nigeria. I was ordered back to England for my health. I was compelled, though, to remain at Lokoja for some little time after I had recovered, to wait for a down-river vessel; but I didn't mind that. After coming through what I had, a reaction had set in—a reaction of high spirits. Seldom had I felt so high-spirited in all my life. Life seemed altogether wonderful.

Lokoja was no great city. It was little more than a military post, yet I thought it delightful. The town stood at the junction of the rivers Niger and Benue, and I remember taking a rickshaw out to the back of the town a little way, where I climbed a small hill and looked down upon those two rivers. They threaded through the country like broad, twisting bands of silver. Here and there down their length canoes were being poled slowly along, while in the surrounding country trickles of smoke curled up from cooking fires in native villages. The time was late afternoon, and in the low light of the sun the ground was streaked with shadows. There was a breeze, and the tree-tops were ruffling. After having lived so long in the low, flat country around Burutu, where hardly even one tree stood higher than its mates, a sight from an elevation like this was most impressive.

And the whites of Lokoja—they were all such good chaps! Though I was a stranger, they were

all most sincerely glad that I had come through my blackwater ordeal. You would have thought they had known me all their lives; we were all whites together in the midst of a black man's country. In great centres of civilization men are distrustful of one another; but a few whites in an outpost are like brothers. We yarned together, and had drinks. I told them bits of my history and they told me bits of theirs. Some of them had been away up both the Niger and the Benue, and I heard of various strange things they had seen there; things perhaps that had not seemed so very strange at the time, being merely incidents in the course of the day's work or march. Other men had been away inland from both rivers. I heard them speak intimately of great African explorers: such men as Boyd Alexander, of the Rifle Brigade, who only a few years before had been at Lokoja on his great journey from the Niger to the Nile. He was evidently a much-liked man.

One of the most popular institutions at Lokoja was an ice plant. It had been started originally by some of the officers clubbing together to get a small plant for their own use. But after it had been installed it became so popular that it had to be enlarged, and finally it became a small factory, working at a profit. Everyone wanted ice. Of all the luxuries in the tropics ice is one of the most desired. In the midst of the Equatorial heat, one's system seems constantly to be calling out for it, a whisky with iced soda is a heaven-sent drink. Also, it is a great blessing to be able to put pieces of ice in the butter-dish, to prevent the butter turning into oil, and to have an ice-chest in which to

keep foods sweet and wholesome. Ice in the tropics! It is one of science's most appreciated gifts to mankind.

In the matter of drinks, I might mention, soda-water was quite as valuable to us as the whisky, if not more so. A bottle of whisky contained a number of drinks, but a bottle of soda only one. Therefore we had to get soda-water in large quantities. Should a bottle be only partly emptied, it was immediately recorked for future use, and in time one became quite expert in re-corking the bottle with a minimum loss of effervescence. The soda bottles were pointed at the bottom and unable to stand up, though why they were that shape I have no idea. However, as you had to re-cork a bottle before putting it down, if you didn't want to lose at least some of its contents, the oval bottom had its advantages for us West Africans.

At Burutu the domestic water was often so bad that we cleaned our teeth in soda-water when we could. There is a very invigorating effect about washing the teeth in that fashion. But we had to have large stocks of soda-water on the premises before we could afford so to squander it, as it were, and the first claims of the soda-water were for mixing with the whisky.

As a further amenity, they had a band at Lokoja; a drum-and-fife band played by members of the native regiment (Hausas). A very smart band it was, too! I watched them with great admiration as they marched past, heads back, the fife notes crisp and sure, the drums sounding their taps with abundant vim. Their tunes were right up-to-date, and this was a point that greatly puzzled

me; it seeming rather strange that natives should have been able to read music. On my making inquiries, however, the secret was revealed. It was true that the players could not read music, but a little matter like that was not calculated to prevent them from learning the tunes. Their bandmaster had obtained gramophone records from England, and these native bandsmen had sat around listening to the records being played and re-played, over and over again, till finally they were able to whistle them. After that it was only a matter of practice with the instruments, and the thing was done. I'll wager that the members of the original band who made those records never dreamt that they would be put to such a use by a party of black musicians in the heart of tropical Africa!

At last the down-river boat arrived, and I took my 'departure from Lokoja. The run down to Burutu was a very different affair from the terrible journey I had made up-stream in the boat laden with explosives. I felt so wonderfully full of life, even though, in so far as my physical appearance went, I was yellowed and thin. I spent much of the time on deck shooting crocodiles, and I think I bagged quite a few of them. At Burutu, after collecting my personal possessions and saying good-bye to my old companions, I transhipped into the English-bound mail-boat.

"Look out for yourself when you get near Cape Vincent," one of my friends warned me. "That's the testing-place for West Africans homeward bound." I knew it. It was the region of the change of the climate from that of the warm south to that of the colder north. The sea off Cape Vincent has

been the grave of many a passenger homing from West Africa. But I had no fears, and I made the passage right through to England without the least distress.

My recovery at Lokoja from blackwater fever had been the nearest escape from death that I had ever had. And therein had come true one of the strange events predicted by the old Indian hawker on the fair ground long before in far-away Western Australia. While, again, because of the special nature of the fever and the boiling heat of the tropical sun, victims of blackwater have to be buried at once, and one of the sights that were shown me at Lokoja, after I left the hospital, had been a grave that had been dug in readiness—for me.

CHAPTER XII

A MOUNTIE I WOULD BE

AFTER a spell in England I decided not to return to the tropics, but to try a cold country for a change. The doctor said that, in view of my severe blackwater experience in Nigeria, a cold country would be the best for me for a time; but in any case I should have adopted some such course, I fancy. I had been a good long time in hot countries, and it was not my nature to have too much of any one condition of life. I thrived on variety—of place, circumstances, and people.

I went, accordingly, to Canada, and in due course made the long train journey from Montreal to Regina, the capital of the province of Saskatchewan, where I had some friends. One incident on that train journey will always remain in my mind.

It was bitterly cold weather, with the temperature away below zero, and at a station called White River the train got frozen to the line. It was absolutely stuck fast. For I know not how long the officials and workmen tried to get us free; doing everything they could think of, including the playing of steam and boiling water on to the frozen wheels and rails.

Everything, however, proved of no avail. Almost as soon as the hot water touched the metals it became frozen. And all the while the engine

strained and grunted, while two other engines tried to push us from the rear. You never saw such a fine example of energy in vain. I got out of the train to stretch my legs, and I don't know that I have ever encountered such a queer sight in all my experience. There our engine was, a powerful one with full steam up, inwardly full of fire and heat and outwardly a mere thing of snow and ice. She was, indeed, completely frozen over; like something from fairy-land or the creation of a Christmas card artist. Even from the boiler hung long icicles like stalactites. The complete indifference to all the inside heat and power was most impressive.

For an hour or more attempts were made to free the train. But still everything was stuck fast; even the carriages being frozen to one another. The place was well named *White River*. In the whole scene there was scarcely any relieving note amid the great whiteness. I had certainly come to a cold country, and after the heat of Nigeria it felt very odd, I can tell you. When one is long in the tropics, scenes like that are so remote that they become shadowy and vague. I had almost forgotten what great cold was like, and I looked at that stranded train with a feeling that somehow it wasn't quite real.

At the end of yet another hour of fruitless endeavour, the workers at last decided on a measure that was heroic, to say the least of it. The conductor gave the "all aboard" order to passengers who were on the platform. Then, when all were in the carriages, the word was passed along that we were to hold on.

"We're going to get her going this time or bust

something, I guess," said one of the officials to me. "But you wanna hold on to something, bo!"

"Why, what's going to happen?" I asked.

The official grinned. "You'll find out soon enough, I guess."

I hung on, and it certainly was well that I did so. A few minutes later there came a terrific crash, and a jolt that made the whole train shake and quiver. People fell out of their bunks, and many who were sitting or standing were thrown violently down. There was a fine crop of concussions, bruises, and sundry injuries. In the restaurant-car great quantities of crockery were smashed to bits. Seats were splintered and windows broken. There were the cries of frightened children, and the anxious voices of women asking what had happened—an earthquake, collision, or what?

A red-faced little man who had fallen to the floor near me slowly picked himself up, looked about wonderingly, then suddenly and anxiously put his hand to his hip-pocket. A look of dismay came on his face. A flask of whisky in his pocket had been broken by his fall, and he walked gingerly off, holding the whisky-wet seat of his trousers away from his body. I fancy the luckless traveller was more distressed by the loss of the whisky than by the physical discomfort of wet trousers.

A fat woman who had been thrown down likewise, just sat there in the middle of the floor, too surprised to make an immediate attempt to rise. There was a kind of bless-my-soul-what's-all-this-about look on her face.

And the cause of it all? Merely that all other attempts to free the train having failed, the two

engines at the rear of the train had been taken back along the line half a mile or so; then, getting a run on, they came crashing down full speed on to the end of the train. The remedy, if drastic, was none the less effective. The shock was just enough to crack the ice which joined the wheels of the frozen train to the rails, and slowly but surely we moved out of White River station at last, and our journey was resumed.

Regina, my destination, was a town of some 30,000 inhabitants, with houses built mostly of wood.

Not long before my arrival, a cyclone had swept the place. It was a remarkable cyclone, for it had a width of only about a hundred yards. It cut clean through the town, completely devastating everything in its path, but leaving the buildings to the right and left untouched. The cyclone's force was almost unbelievable. Two 40-ton railway box-cars, loaded with grain, were lifted clean over the station into the prairie on the other side. Houses were uprooted, thrown down, and smashed to pieces. The power of the wind seemed to be much more than a mere matter of velocity. It was as if some enormous giant had picked the buildings up in his arms, and thrown them down with a vicious "*There!*" Various remarkable narrow escapes had been recorded. Some men, who were playing cards upstairs in a house, suddenly found the whole upper part of the building lifted away from the rest. The men were taken a considerable distance through the air before finally being dumped on to the ground. The whole thing happened in a few moments, and the card

players hardly had time to rise from the table when the part in which they were hit the earth and their surroundings came collapsing around them, luckily without seriously injuring anyone.

Regina was the headquarters of the famous Royal North-West Mounted Police, and the members of that force did great work in restoring and maintaining order during and after the cyclone. It is a sad reflection on human nature that there should always be people ready to profit by the extreme distress of others; but such is only too often the case. Looters promptly appeared in the wake of the cyclone, and had it not been for the North-West Mounted Police, their depredations would have been serious. But the police patrol took matters in hand, and, in view of the fact that among the looters were numbers of desperadoes, it says a great deal for the ability of the Mounted Police that they were able to maintain order without being under the necessity to shoot. You must not gather from this, however, that there was anything soft or ladylike about the methods the police employed. In that time of extremity they went around armed with pick-handles for batons.

My first necessity was to get a job. I had a bit of money, and could have stayed doing nothing for quite a while. But I was not the sort of man who is happy when idle, and I knew it was wise to keep my bit of money against a rainy day.

There wasn't much work offering at Regina, however. I applied for a job as a street-car driver or conductor. I tried to join the fire-brigade. It's quite a tradition that sailors—especially sailing-ship men—should join fire-brigades. I suppose it is

because there is a sort of relation between the rigging of a ship and a fireman's ladder. But the Regina fire-brigade didn't want sailors, or anybody else.

At last I got employment painting window-frames. This was in a mass-production place, and my task was to put a coat of foundation paint on the frames before they left the factory and went to the various carpenters and builders. I was paid two and a-half dollars a day, which was quite good pay at that time; but the work was monotonous and soul-destroying. Every frame was the same: so many inches of wood to be covered with salmon-coloured paint; so many strokes of the brush this way, so many that. It was the sort of job where you always had the feeling you were never getting anywhere, and that sort of feeling is one of the most despairing a man can have.

I soon reached the point where I couldn't stand it any longer. "Damn it all," I thought, "have I been all the things that I have been, lived and adventured in all the places that I have, only at last to become a painter of window-frames—an endless succession of window-frames!" I called to mind those fellows in car factories and other places, who all day long perform one single operation, such as screwing a nut on a bolt, and it gave me a feeling of horror to think that I had become like one of them. I said to myself: "To hell with it!" and threw up the job.

I then decided to see if I could get into the North-West Mounted Police. I had a great admiration for the men of that famous force, with their scarlet jackets, stetsons, riding-boots and gauntlets.

There was about them an atmosphere of forthrightness and romance which appealed to me greatly. To become one of their number became my keen ambition; and on learning from one of my friends that he was in a position to give me a letter of introduction to the North-West Mounted Police authorities, I begged him to do me that favour.

My friend, however, attempted to dissuade me. He pointed out that the pay was small—only 60 cents a day. He wanted me to go in for business, do something that would give at least a reasonable financial return. But I wouldn't listen to him. Payment wasn't everything. I had long since learned that while money was necessary and useful, there were many other things of value in life.

There was a story I had once heard of a meeting between a U.S.A. policeman from the neighbouring State of Maine, and a constable of the North-West Mounted.

"Say, they tell me yuh fellers only get 60 cents a day!" said the United States man.

"That is so," answered the Mountie.

"Why, over in Maine we get two and a-half dollars a day! Some difference, eh?"

The Mountie looked the other up and down. "There sure is a difference," he drawled. "I wouldn't swap over into your force for twenty dollars a day!"

That was somewhat how I felt about the thing myself. In the end, therefore, my friend gave me the letter of introduction, and I went round to the Mounted Police headquarters and applied.

I soon found it wasn't easy to become a Mountie. References as to character had to be satisfactory,



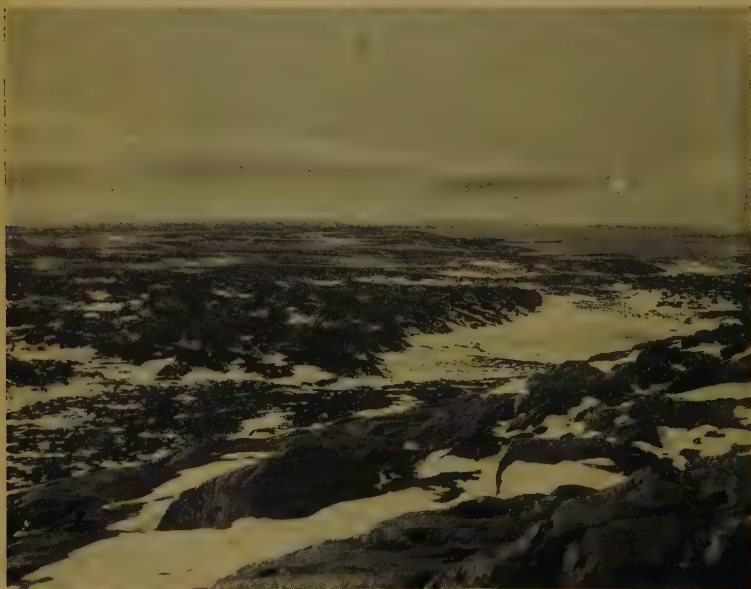
INDIAN FUNERAL, HUDSON BAY.

WOOLWICH PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

[see page 226]



YORK FACTORY, HUDSON BAY COMPANY'S POST
Built over 150 years ago [see page 212]



BAKER LAKE: FIRST PHOTOGRAPH EVER TAKEN OF IT
Northern end of Chesterfield Inlet [see page 241]

and there was a rigid health examination. In view of my illness in Nigeria, I was rather afraid of this health examination. However, my constitution was a very strong one, and, the blackwater fever having done me no permanent injury, I passed the test with flying colours. I was then asked to sit down and write the story of my life. This I did, telling of my seafaring experiences, of my membership of the Legion of Frontiersmen, and the rest. The reason for the latter request was twofold. First, it would show what sort of a hand I would be at writing reports, and in a sense was also by way of being an educational test. Second, the screed I had written would form a useful record of my career, for filing purposes.

After that, I was told I was accepted on probation—for a period of nine weeks, during which time I would be given part of my uniform issue. I felt very pleased about it all, I can assure you! In the same way that, as an apprentice on sailing-ships, I used to look forward eagerly to the day when I would be a captain on the bridge, so did I look forward to the time when, my term of probation completed, I should be a full-fledged Mountie—in full uniform, scarlet jacket, stetson, riding-boots and all.

But in the days that immediately followed I didn't feel nearly so happy. There were times during that probationary period when, if I had not been a man accustomed to discipline—the discipline that I had learnt at sea—I might have thrown up the whole business.

I was put in the awkward squad—called the Number 4 Squad—under a Rough-riding Master,

who was a man of cast-iron discipline. He put us through it! Indeed, it is said that not one out of a dozen would-be recruits into the North-West Mounted Police ever get past the probationary period. That period is altogether too much for them. Yet it is the only sort of thing that has helped to make that famous force what it is. Its members simply *have* to be able to stand up to things. They must learn how to control themselves, before they can have much chance of being able to control others. Which, incidentally, is a law of life that never fails. The would-be Mounties have got to learn to become men of iron. Not long ago I was speaking with a man who had been in the North-West Mounted Police and also in the French Foreign Legion, and he gave it as his considered opinion that the discipline of the North-West Mounted Police was more severe than that of the Foreign Legion.

That Rough-riding Master never for a moment "let up" on us members of the awkward squad. He drove us incessantly, putting us through riding-drill of all kinds. He barked his orders. He was one of the toughest of old-timers. He demanded instant obedience, and if he didn't get it there was a fine old upheaval! He usually got it, though, by gad! He'd whip your horse suddenly from behind, so that it would gallop off, and you had to hang on for your very life. As a Legion of Frontiersman, I'd had some experience of horses, and thought I knew a bit about them. But that cut no ice here. When it came to sticking on to a horse which had been stampeded in the way I have described, I wasn't much better than any other recruit.

Sometimes the Rough-riding Master's long whip would fall about my shoulders, instead of my horse, as it often did about the shoulders of other men in the squad. It looked like an accident, but you had more than a suspicion that the Rough-riding Master had meant it; extreme accuracy, not clumsiness, was a feature of his whip play. That was a moment when the angry blood surged in one's veins. There were often times when I would have liked to take it out of that Rough-riding Master!

One of the Riding Master's most offensive—and effective—weapons was sarcasm. He would halt the squad, parade one of the men before it, and make him a butt for jibes of the most sneering sort imaginable. Well do I remember an occasion when he paraded me in such a fashion!

"Fall out, you!" he ordered.

I rode out in front of the squad. They all sat on their horses watching me, not one of them speaking, and each trying to keep himself and his horse as motionless as possible. It was part of the drill to keep yourself and your mount motionless when halted.

"Here you see a fine specimen!" said the Rough-riding Master in his most biting tone. "A sailor—and he wants to join the Royal North-West Mounted Police! This is a *mounted* force. It's got *horses* in it. But you'd think this man hardly knew that. You'd think he'd never seen a horse in his life, let alone ride one. You saw the way he flopped all over the saddle just now. That's the way *not* to do it, men! But of course he doesn't know that. He's a sailor. He's used to riding—waves!"

He turned swiftly to me. "Do you hear what I'm saying?"

"Yes, sir," I answered promptly.

"Don't speak to me when I ask you a question," he barked. "What you've got to learn, my man, is that the tail of a horse is not the rudder! You steer with the reins! Understand me?"

I made no answer this time.

"Oh, you refuse to answer when I speak to you, eh? There are such things as dumb insolence and silent contempt. It'll be the guard-room for you, my lad, if you're not careful." And so on and on in this heavily sarcastic vein.

Oh, it certainly wasn't easy to put up with! When that kind of thing was going on, I would remember that I'd been a master of ships and a controller of large numbers of black workmen, and wasn't used to being spoken to in such a fashion. It would have been the easiest thing in the world at those moments to say "to the devil with all this humiliation," and to have cleared out. Nevertheless, I stuck it. I knew it was all just a part of the training, and that I couldn't be a Mountie without it. Accordingly, I set my teeth and said I was going to get through that probation period somehow. In due time I graduated from Number 4 Squad into Number 3, and from Number 3 into Number 2, and then finally into Number 1, the last of the probationary squads. And so at length I finished my nine weeks course and became a Mountie. Very few of that Number 4 Squad won right through. Some, on reaching the end of the probation, declined to go on any farther. The

discipline of the probationary period had been too much for them.

After becoming a full-fledged Mountie, for the next few months I spent most of my time at headquarters doing routine work, prison work, and suchlike. The prison work was much like that of a warder's. Each night I had to see that the prisoners undressed, put their clothes outside the cell, and were safely locked up. I had to see them dress in the morning, fed, and put to work. There was always a lot of stable work to do, and general cleaning.

Once or twice I was sent out on prison escort duty. One of the prisoners I thus escorted was a poor devil of a lunatic; and a fine time he gave me, too! He was always trying some little game on me. On one occasion he asked for a piece of chewing tobacco, and I gave it him. I suppose it was against the rules, but I was sorry for the poor wretch. For a while the man chewed away happily, but as he didn't spit, and as spitting is an inevitable accompaniment of tobacco chewing, I wondered what he was up to. I thought perhaps he was swallowing the stuff, so as to make himself sick. But though I watched him carefully, the other didn't seem to be swallowing, and it was only when I asked him what he was doing that I found out. In answer to my question, he suddenly spat the whole mouthful of juice straight at me, all over my scarlet coat. He had been saving it up for this purpose.

One of my colleagues had a terrible experience with a lunatic whom he was escorting. He had arrested the lunatic far away in the snows of the

north, and was bringing him on a journey of some hundreds of miles south. He had a dog team and sledge, but no one to assist him.

That journey should really go down as one of the most magnificent in the annals of the country.

Bad weather overtook the captor and his prisoner, and they ran short of rations. The Mountie was compelled to shoot the dogs one by one, and to use them for food. The poor, wretched lunatic then became too weak to eat, and the Mountie fed him himself. At night he lay on the top of the other to keep him warm. He had constantly to watch that the madman did not get hold of his firearms, yet he also had always to be within reach of his revolver.

For a long way the Mountie carried the man on his back. If ever there was a case of a Mountie doing his duty, it was during that journey. My colleague represented the traditions of the great North-West Mounted, and was going to get his man in—somehow. He battled on and on through the snow and the bitter cold—starving, growing weaker and weaker, yet sticking to it all he knew. All the while there was that urgent necessity to watch that the madman didn't harm himself or his protector; he had continually to listen to his companion's jibberings, and to see the other's wild face close beside him.

Well, that Mountie did it. He brought his man safely through. But when they arrived—it's hard to have to write it—the Mountie was himself a mental case. . . .

I was occasionally sent out some distance on jobs during this period. One job was to go to a

place called Fort Qu'appelle, a lake and pleasure resort 100-odd miles to the eastward, where it was reported that two men had been drowned. My job was to search for their bodies.

I arrived to find myself quite a person of importance. It was the first time that I fully realized in what great respect the Mounties everywhere were held. I was taken to the best hotel, given the best of rooms, and no charge was made. The manager put himself out to make me comfortable, and people looked at me with interest. It was not often that Mounties were seen around there. I felt proud of belonging to the North-West Mounted, and to this day I don't know of any other police force in the world which is held in such respect.

I lost no time in getting to work on the case of the drowned men. There seemed to be something of a mystery about it. The two men had been fishing in the lake from a small sailing-boat, which capsized. They were known to be good swimmers, and it was known also that at the time of the disaster they were not intoxicated or anything of that kind. The boat was seen to capsize, and throw the men into the water. But they did not come up again, and nobody was able to suggest why that should have been so. It seemed most unnatural that two perfectly good swimmers should have disappeared in such a manner.

I obtained grappling irons and a boat, and went out into the lake to drag for the bodies. It was no small job. The lake covered an area of a good many square miles, and I was given only the approximate position where the boat had capsized.

Up and down I dragged, and back and forth. Dragging for human bodies is a most unpleasant business; somehow, you don't like the thought that at any moment the hooks of the drag might encounter dead human flesh. More than once when the drag pulled and we stopped and hauled it in, I was almost glad to see that it was a stone or other obstruction, and not a man.

For some hours I went on with the dragging business, but without success. Then it occurred to me that perhaps a drag of a finer nature would be better. Accordingly, I obtained a number of garden rakes from the town, and by lashing them together edgeways made a wide drag of comparatively fine texture.

Very soon, after that, success attended my efforts. There came a slight check to the rakes and, on hauling them up, I found they had engaged—a fishing line! I hauled the rakes aboard and followed the fishing line along, presently reaching a spot where the line led straight down to the bottom. There was only about 8 feet of water. I hauled gently, and presently brought up the body of one of the drowned men. I got the corpse on board, and a few minutes later found the body of the second man. They were both entangled in a great quantity of the fishing line, coil after coil of it.

The mystery was solved. The fishing line had been lying loose on the bottom of the boat when it upset, and as the two men were thrown into the water, the line was flung over and about them, hopelessly entangling them. The men simply hadn't had a chance to swim. Which goes to show what a simple thing can lead to a man's destruction!



CREE INDIAN MOTHER AND CHILD

[see page 195]



ESKIMO GRANDMOTHER, KIDLIMUTE TRIBE,
SPURREL'S HARBOUR

The wooden supports under armpits are to prevent sealskin cord cutting into skin when carrying a child or load

[see page 235]

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ESKIMO CHILD IN POLICE CANOE ALONGSIDE SCHOONER

[see page 235]

My first six months as a Mountie at Regina passed away. I made trips here and there into the near-by country on various little tasks, all the time gaining valuable experience of police work. It was all very interesting, and I loved it; none the less, I looked forward to the time when I might be stationed farther afield, in the wilds. That to me was the *real* life of a Mountie.

Regina was a strange town; it had a remarkable capacity for altering itself. Even after an absence of only a week or two, I was liable to find a difference in the place. The alterations mostly consisted of wooden houses changing themselves into brick ones. The Regina folk were constantly doing this. The original houses were of weatherboarding, but when a house-owner had sufficient capital to make himself a brick residence, he proceeded to do so without pulling the old wooden one down. He merely erected the brick walls about the original wooden ones. Thus there was no lack of a home while the new house was being constructed. It was an ingenious idea, but one which without exception struck newcomers as remarkably quaint.

The difference that the change from wood to brick made in a street was astounding. I would find myself looking along what only a few weeks before had been a familiar row of wooden houses, and feel that I was in some strange town. Even the people of such a street seemed different; a man inhabiting a brick house gaining an added assurance in his attitude towards life. Likewise, the womenfolk of such men showed themselves equally conscious of an improved social status.

A philosopher would no doubt say that it was a case of a man reflecting the qualities and conditions of his environment.

Nor was this brick-into-wood business the only strange thing about Regina's houses.

Once, on returning from a trip away of several day's duration, I decided to call on an old friend who lived in a certain street in Regina. But when I reached my destination I found no sign whatever of the house in question. The buildings on either side were there all right, but my friend's house had disappeared as completely as if it had never existed. Now, I knew the house had been there for years, and I had often visited there. Yet all that confronted me was an empty space. It always gives one a shock to find some long-established thing had disappeared; the eyes seem reluctant to take in the obvious fact.

There was, however, nothing so very uncanny about the matter in reality. On my making an inquiry from one of the neighbours, the matter was explained. My friend had bought a piece of land in a street he liked better, and after jacking his home up on to a low trolley—it was a wooden house, of course—had shifted the structure over to the new site as it stood! Regina folk often moved their wooden abodes in this way—and quite large affairs some of them were—which was another reason why the character of the streets was so liable quickly to change.

One other thing stands out in my memory of my six months at Regina. It was my experience as a "death watch" at the prison.

A "death watch" is a policeman keeping guard

over a prisoner condemned to death. This particular prisoner was a young man who had had a love-affair with another man's wife, and eventually killed her husband. It was my duty to keep constant watch on the condemned man. The condemned cell was made of steel slats, and I could see into it all the time. The prisoner lay on a bed supported by chains. It was night, and there was a great quietness everywhere. The prisoner was on his bed, and seemingly asleep. After a time it struck me that he looked rather pale; but I thought that in view of his dreadful position this was only natural. A bit later, however, he seemed paler still; and then suddenly I caught the smell of—blood!

I obtained help, and we entered the cell. The prisoner was nearly gone. His blankets and clothes were soaked in blood. By means of a buckle taken from his clothing he had scratched open the veins of his wrists. Medical skill brought the fellow round, and he was saved.

Yet, for my part—well, it seemed to me it would have been far more humane to have let him die there in his cell from loss of blood. What good was there in bringing him back to life, only to put him to death later on? So long as he passed out, surely the law would have been satisfied. In saving him there was a definite refinement of cruelty.

CHAPTER XIII

NORTH BY CANOE

AT the end of my six months in Regina volunteers were called for among the Mounted Police, to make a long and hazardous canoe journey. It was that of 800 miles down the full length of the Nelson river, to Port Nelson on the shores of Hudson Bay. I volunteered and was accepted. The reason for the journey was to establish a police post at Port Nelson, which in the near future was to become a scene of great activity. Port Nelson was actually a desolate and barren spot, but it was planned to make a port—a real port—of the place, at a cost of many millions of dollars. This was in connection with a scheme for getting Canadian wheat to Europe by a much more direct route than those commonly employed. A great pier was to be built. An enormously expensive dredger was to be sent there to work. Tugs, ice-breakers, and other craft would be used, and hundreds of men employed. In view of all this activity, and influx of population, it was necessary to have a police post at the place to ensure law and order.

There were three of us in the party that eventually started out—Sergeant Walker, Constable Rogers, and myself. The first part of the journey was by steamer across Lake Winnipeg; from Selkirk in the south to a spot in the north where

the Nelson River began—that is, the place where the lake emptied itself into the Nelson—the trip across the lake was a far from easy one. We struck dirty weather, and such on those inland seas can be very bad indeed.

There was a nasty, short sea of a kind seldom experienced upon the ocean itself. It seemed to fling itself at the ship, instead of throwing the ship about. It snarled and jolted, so that you felt it was trying to behave like the deep sea and, failing, was on that account all the more vicious. I didn't like it; no deep-water man has any love for inland waters. He feels oddly uncomfortable there; and the fact that he is enclosed by land—even though the lake may be so big that he cannot see its boundaries—is something that he does not like. He feels that in some indefinable way his surroundings are treacherous.

The captain of this lake steamer drove her through the gale, however. He was a rough-looking, rough-spoken person, that skipper, whom I suspected of wanting to make himself appear even rougher than he was. Or, it may have been that he wanted to impress us as being a deep-sea man, which he very definitely wasn't. At any rate, his language was the foulest I have ever heard, and would have put to shame the foulest mouthed "bucco mate" in existence. His swearing vocabulary, plain and fancy, was such that he seemed able to go on indefinitely without repeating himself. Every sentence that he spoke had its quota of oaths, and one might have supposed he was always in the most raging temper. Yet in the end I almost felt sorry for him. Life must have been

terrible for a man who simply could not open his mouth without damning and blasting everything. His hearers certainly found it unutterably boring after a time.

Still, the fellow was a very fair seaman, and we reached Warren's Landing, our destination at the northern end of the lake, safely. There the Sergeant went ashore, to arrange about Indian guides and certain stores for the long river journey in front of us. Rogers and I, meanwhile, got into one of three canoes we had brought, and proceeded into the river. The idea was that the Sergeant, with the Indian guides, would follow along later, and pick us up at a certain point—Norway House, the first northern police post. We very nearly never reached that point. We knew that the journey before us might be adventurous, but we hardly thought that the adventures would begin so soon.

To start with, Rogers and I took the wrong entrance to the river. Unknown to us there were two entrances, and after entering the opening that appeared before us in the shore of the lake, we went paddling happily along. It was evening, but there was a bright moon, and the water, with its chequering of shadows, made everything look rather pleasant. Our craft had been made by the famous Peterborough Canoe Company, perhaps the best makers of canoes in the world, and it glided along smoothly and easily. There is a fascination in gliding along thus in a canoe; the craft is so sensitive to the paddle that almost you could imagine it was alive and responding—responding, moreover, not so much to your physical touch as to your mood.

After a while, it began to dawn on us that we were a long time in reaching the rendezvous. We concluded, however, that it must be farther than we had thought, and paddled on a little more swiftly. Until at length, suddenly, we knew that there was something wrong. From ahead came a sound of rushing water, and a moment later, on rounding a bend, we found ourselves in a rapids.

The canoe was flung this way and that. The water boiled and foamed all about us, and our craft began to fill. We baled for dear life, at the same time doing our best to steer straightly. Down and down the rapids we went. We scraped past rocks, several times bumping into them. It was a wonder that the canoe stood the strain; an inferior craft would certainly have been holed or smashed to pieces.

On and on we went—then plunged, with a plonk, over a falls! I don't know how many feet the drop was—ten, probably; which was quite far enough! Out alone on that moonlit river which we didn't know anything about, it was altogether a breath-taking experience. Everything about us was chaos—chaos of movement and sound. Nevertheless, somehow or other we landed on the lower water right way up, and, though the canoe was almost swamped, we went rushing on down the stream. Rogers and I looked at one another without speaking. There certainly are times when silence is far more eloquent than words, and that was one of them.

On reaching still water, we ran the canoe ashore, emptied it, and resumed the journey. We realized

that there must have been more than one entrance to the river, and that we had taken the wrong one; but we reckoned, also, that if we kept on following our present course we must come to the main river eventually. And so it turned out.

But before we came to Norway House, a further adventure befell us. As we paddled along, we saw a landing-stage on the bank ahead, and when we came closer made out a house in the background. It was a wooden building, appearing dark and solid in the moonlight, all its shutters closed, no light showing anywhere, and no smoke coming from the chimney.

Then, even as we gazed, there suddenly appeared the figure of a woman, all in white, standing between the landing-stage and the house. Where the woman came from, neither my companion nor I could tell. One moment no one was in sight, and the next the strange apparition was before us. The moonlight shone full upon the unknown. She was rather tall, and her long, black hair showed in striking contrast with the whiteness of her dress. Her face was curiously thin, and she seemed to be looking straight in front of her across the river. It was certainly a startling phenomenon, and at the time we were quite close in to the bank and only a few yards away.

Yet, if we were startled, the woman was even more so. We stopped paddling and asked her if we were right for Norway House, whereupon she seemed all at once to become aware of our presence. She threw up her arms and uttered a piercing cry, making our blood run cold. For one moment the woman continued to stand there, staring at us; then,

turning swiftly, she ran quickly back towards the house and disappeared.

Rogers and I brought the canoe alongside the landing-stage and went ashore. At least, we felt, some investigation of the matter was called for. But we saw nothing further of the mysterious female, and our knockings at the door of the house brought no reply. The place was obviously empty.

As to a solution of the affair, we never obtained one. Inquiries we made of people we met later along the river revealed most positively that no one had ever heard of a woman being at that house. Was it, therefore, a real woman at all? I don't know. I am not superstitious, I have no ideas as to whether there is an after-life or not. Such subjects undoubtedly intrigue the imagination, but I have no convictions one way or the other. Accordingly I merely relate this episode exactly as it happened, and attempt neither comment nor explanation. Even so, I will say that there in the moonlight, as Rogers and I sat in that canoe, there was more than a suspicion of the wall of the house behind the woman being visible *through* her. . . .

The next day the river journey was properly begun. The Sergeant had obtained three Indian guides, which brought the number of our party up to six. Our three canoes each carried a Mountie and a guide, together with a quantity of equipment—bedding, stores, arms, etc. The Indians were most experienced river- and canoe-men. They were Crees, and very fine types. Their faces had that aquiline cast which is so distinctive of their race. Their sight and hearing were extraordinarily keen, and their bodies lithe and agile. In time of stress

they were most dependable. They had a great respect for us Mounties; and I'm sure they were very proud of having been chosen as our guides.

Day after day we made our way down the long Nelson river. And right through that 800-mile journey, each day brought its own sharp experiences. Often we were whirled along through rapids, when navigation called for great skill. First, we would hear the faint rush of the water; and then, as we drew nearer, the rushing sound would grow until it had become a roar, menacing and pitiless. When we reached a point just above the rapids, the canoes would be run ashore, and the Indian guides would climb to an overlooking part of the bank and make a reconnaissance.

It was very important that the Indians should thus spy out the way ahead. They had to get the lie of the water, so to speak; to estimate its speed and the extent of its swirls. Our guides picked out the rocks and traced the channels, noted which rocks were jagged and which smooth. In a rapids you might scrape more or less safely past a smooth rock, but you daren't touch a jagged one. The Indians picked all out carefully first, and made a mental map of the route.

At length the canoes would be boarded again, and we would go whirling down the rushing water. The way the Indians steered was often nothing short of marvellous. You would swear that we were bound to smash into a rock lying straight ahead, the water boiling over it; then, with the least twist of the paddle, we would skim past the danger. It was a matter for fine judgment, indeed—and nerve.

• Nerve, in fact, was supremely important. If a

man lost his head, he was done. Some of those rapids were absolutely terrifying. There was one, called the Manitou Rapids, where any number of men had been drowned. On the bank below these rapids was a number of graves of men who had been lost in the terrible swirl of the waters, and their bodies thrown up later on the bank. They looked most forlorn and pathetic, those graves, in that remote spot.

The chief danger of the Manitou Rapids was a whirlpool near the bottom. It was a nasty-looking thing, which occupied very nearly the whole width of the stream. There was barely room for a canoe to pass between the bank and the edge of the vortex.

I have already said that, as a deep-water man, I loathe narrow waters. I miss the spaciousness of the sea, and, compared with the treachery of narrows, the open sea is a thing of fine friendliness. But never have I hated anything as I did that Manitou Rapids and its whirlpool. I absolutely loathed the latter. I don't mean that I was so terribly scared of it; I was as willing as the next man to take a risk. I was just that it looked so dark and oily and treacherous. It was something that I preferred to have nothing to do with; in the same fashion as there might be certain low-down types of human beings that filled me with repugnance.

The canoe swept down on towards the whirlpool. The Indian kept his expert eye on the edge of the swirl. If the canoe got into it, the result would be a prompt capsize; and in the rush and eddy we would have little chance to swim. The Indian kept a tense yet sensitive grip of his paddle,

and gave the blade a slight twist this way and then that.

In the grip of the straight rush of the water, our craft sped along as if it were alive. I could feel it quiver, and it seemed to give a kind of wriggle. Now and then the water bubbled on board. The bank was only a matter of inches away, so that I had to keep my elbow inboard to avoid touching it. If the canoe had scraped the bank, we should, at the speed at which we were travelling, have been ripped open. On our other hand, also only an inch or two away, was the edge of the whirlpool.

Nevertheless, we did it; making the whole of the perilous passage without the least mishap. And if previously we had had considerable admiration for those Indians, from there onwards we were prepared to give them the absolute palm for excellence. The Indians, in their turn, tried to make light of the matter. There is a good deal of the stoic in the character of the far-north American Indian. All the same, I knew that they privately considered that they had done very well to come through as safely as they had. The Manitou Rapids have the reputation of being the most dangerous in all the whole 800-mile length of the Nelson river.

For some distance below the Manitou the river represented a curious appearance. It was quite smooth, but seemed to slope steeply. Looking back up its smooth surface was looking up a hill, and had it been a road, walking back up it would have been quite a labour. I have never seen this phenomenon anywhere since, and the Indians said that they had never known another stretch of river that looked like that. I daresay the slope was some

kind of optical illusion, but it certainly appeared very real.

Some time after passing the Manitou, the whole expedition as nearly as possible came utterly to grief.

We were going along happily enough, and everything seemed in order. The sun was shining and the spruce-trees stretching away from the bank on either side, made a pleasant criss-cross of shadows on the ground. There was no sign of danger anywhere, and almost the only sound was that of a fall in the river some indefinite distance ahead. Then suddenly a curious sight showed in front of us—the top of a tree which seemed to be growing in the middle of the river! It seemed unbelievable to see a tree in such a position, yet there was absolutely no doubt about its presence.

One glimpse was enough for the Indians. They instantly swung the canoes to the bank and paddled for dear life. That tree top was the head of a tall tree at the foot of a falls! We were almost on the brink of the cascade, which had a drop of 75 feet! If we had gone over there wouldn't have been the least hope for us; we should have been pounded to pieces on the rocks below.

We reached the bank only just in time. One of the canoes was a mere matter of three yards from the edge of the drop when it grounded. The Indian pilot had often, no doubt, had occasion in his life for hard paddling, but never harder than he paddled then, I'll swear. That particular drop in the river was known as the Grand Falls, and was the biggest on the Nelson.

We had to make a *portage* of it round those falls.

That is, we took all our goods ashore and carried them round the falls to a point on the bank some distance below them. The distance was over a mile, and tough going it was, too; what with swamp, a tangle of brushwood underfoot, great rocks and what-not. We had to make several trips. Our goods had not seemed of any great weight or quantity when packed in the canoe; but when we had to carry them round it was a different matter. It was the sort of job you'd think was never going to end.

The Indians, however, were very expert at it and, by means of a supporting band—called a tump strap—across their forehead, carried enormous loads chiefly supported by the tump straps, their hands being left free to negotiate the difficulties of the trail. The canoes themselves were not difficult, being so light that a man could manage one of them alone.

This *portage* round the Grand Falls was far from being the only one of the trip. Every other day we were compelled to go ashore and transport our things in this way. *Portages* slowed our progress considerably; but naturally it was all part of the game of river travelling, and had to be allowed for in making calculation as to the time the journey would take.

Halts for repairs had also to be reckoned with. Although strong the canoes, and skilled the Indians, it was impossible for the craft not to get damaged on some rock or other. It was then a matter of paddling swiftly to the shore and taking the cargo out, and if it were wet, of allowing it to dry. The latter eventuality, nevertheless, but seldom occurred; the cargo being carefully protected by

water-proof coverings. After being landed, a damaged canoe was turned over and the hole repaired—usually by means of a square of bacon rind and a sheet of tin. Whenever we boiled a piece of bacon, the rind was carefully kept for this same purpose. It was placed over the hole, with the sheet of tin covering it in its turn, and the lot fastened on firmly with strong tacks. This made a perfect mend.

Another thing that held us up was a gale we encountered while crossing a sheet of water called Goose Lake. (At various spots the river ran into lakes, after crossing which we picked up the stream again.) This lake was about sixty miles long and ten wide, and when we got out to the middle it was almost like being at sea. The gale descended on us from straight ahead, and almost completely without warning. We were miles from the shore, so that our position rapidly became perilous. The canoes had only a few inches of freeboard, and the water swirled and heaved all about us, while plenty of it slopped on board. The sea was such that to have turned and run before it would most likely have meant our being swamped. It was a short sea, travelling much faster than we could possibly do, and it would easily have overrun us. The only thing, therefore, was to keep the canoe's head on to it; and this we did.

I never knew that paddling could be such hard labour. It had been all very well coming along the river proper—just paddling easily, or sometimes not at all, merely giving the blade a twist now and again for steering purposes. Indeed, parts of the journey down the river we had made very

pleasantly under sails with which the canoes were provided.

But standing up to a gale of wind in Goose Lake was a very different matter. We had to put our full weight into the paddles. It was a case of bending to it with all one's strength for hours on end. We whites were stiff and sore for a long while afterwards. If we had swamped, it would have been the end of the party for certain; miles away out in that great lake, with no other human beings within I know not how many days journey. It was with a feeling of tremendous achievement that at last we regained the ordinary stretches of the river once more.

Only very occasionally on that trip did we encounter other human beings. Most of those we did meet, however, were interesting. At a place called Cross Lake there was an old trader, a Scotsman, who, though afflicted with some complaint of the eyes so that he was almost blind, yet took the most wonderful photographs. It seemed impossible that he should be able to focus the lens, or see the objects in the view-finder; yet somehow he managed to do so, with results that were remarkable for clarity, grouping, and artistic conception. The man told me that he had a kind of instinct for it. When a human being loses his sight it is very common for his other senses to be sharpened to make up for the loss; yet in this case it was as if the man had developed a new sense altogether.

He was a quaint old character, that Scotsman. He had been trading for thirty years or more, and was full of tales of the old days. A novelist seeking character and action for a story of that out-of-

the-way part of the world would have found the old fellow a gold-mine. He had a squaw wife, and five or six half-caste children. These last ran about the place like rabbits, and were very interested in us Mounties. It was not often they saw a white man apart from their father. Two were girls in their teens, with passionate eyes, and one could not help wondering what would become of them later on.

At a place called Split Lake there was a police post, manned by two Mounties. They were a pair of good chaps who hadn't had any news of the outer world for heaven knew how long, and they seized eagerly upon some newspapers and magazines that we had brought. They listened avidly to what news we had to tell them—of happenings in Winnipeg, Regina, and other places. We talked shop a lot. We told of how so-and-so had been transferred to Alberta, or such-and-such a constable had gone to the Yukon; and in their turn they told us of happenings in their own district—of a mysterious Indian death, and how a man who had been raiding fox and mink traps had been caught.

They were fine, upstanding men, those two Mounties, with the clear eyes and clear skin that you often find in the cold, far north. Their lives were active ones, and they seldom suffered from the loneliness of their remote situation. They were, however, most companionable men for all that. We stayed the night with them, and I shall always remember the friendliness and the homeliness of the atmosphere as we sat around the fire and "yarned."

A gramophone was put on, someone sang a song, and we had a drink or two. The faces of the two

Split Lake Mounties showed finely clear-cut in the twilight. They looked wonderfully resolute; you felt that in a tight corner you could safely trust your life with such men. I felt quite sorry when in the morning the time came for our departure. Our two hosts will probably feel very embarrassed should they ever chance to read these words. All that they knew about themselves and their situation was that they were merely doing their job, their duty.

Another white man we met at Split Lake was a missionary, the Rev. Fox, an Anglican clergyman who, with his wife, lived and ministered in that far outpost. They were a remarkably happy pair. Instead of ageing them, the passing of the years in the cold north had made them younger. They were full of life and gusto, like children. They were ready for any game, for the playing of any larks; laughter came easily from their lips. Back in civilization, one saw so many grave-looking and sedate parsons, with subdued-looking wives, that it was refreshing to come across a gay pair like that. It made you feel that if all its teachers were like those two, present-day religion would be much more worth while than it is.

Occasionally, as we made our way down the river, we saw Indian camps on the banks. They were usually small affairs; just a rough wooden hut or two, with now and again a kind of bell-tent arrangement—a wigwam—made out of a framework of sticks covered chiefly with skins. The Indians mostly lived by trapping, and were a shy lot. Sometimes as we passed, our guides would hail them, and they would give us information

about the state of the river farther on. For the most part, though, the Indians stood there and watched us go past without speaking. There was a curious suggestion of immobility about them; it was almost as if they reflected some of the sternness inherent in the country itself.

Sometimes we would see a group of two or three squaws, one perhaps with a papoose peeping out of the top of the shawl by which his mother carried him on his back. Older children peered at us from behind their mothers' skirts. Some of the squaws were good-looking, in a way, though not at all to be compared with English or American women. Their good looks, such as they were, were of a kind belonging wholly to their race, and only properly to be appreciated by members of that race.

Tuberculosis was rife among these people. Far too many of them had the hectic flush of the consumptive, while often the first sign that we had of the presence of an Indian was the sound of a cough. It was intensely pathetic. Those coughs were the tokens, as it were, of a vanishing people—a people with a great tradition.

Here and there, along the river, we came upon huts or camps abandoned for various reasons. Sometimes it was the camp of a trapper, who had exhausted the trapping possibilities of that particular locality. Most of the inhabitants of that region lived by trapping. The skins most sought after were those of fox, beaver, mink, martin and musk-rat, and they, in due course, found their way to one or other of the Hudson Bay Company's posts, where usually they were exchanged for stores, ammunition, etc. With rare exception, however, it

was a hard and precarious way of earning a living. One hears a lot of stories about the romance of a trapper's life; but there has seldom seemed to be anything very romantic about it to me.

Upon another occasion we saw, abandoned on the bank of the river, a steam-tug. This was a vessel which, at one time, had been used for towing pine-logs along the river to a saw-mill. The tug had been brought to that part of the river in sections, owing to the intervening rapids and falls both up and down the river, and had been put together on the spot. But the mill didn't pay, and the enterprise was at length given up. As it would have been too expensive to take the tug to pieces and cart it away again, she was accordingly just run ashore and abandoned.

It was a queer sight to see a steam-boat all that way inland. She seemed so utterly out of place; a thing of the outer seas that had got stranded far from her proper element. The tug had evidently been there quite a while. The paint was peeling from her sides, her deck gaped, her funnel had acquired a battered appearance, and the wheel looked as if the spokes might easily come away. In that land of white silence she was the most silent thing of all.

Thus day after day we made our way along that great river. Until, at last, after nearly three weeks of travelling, we reached our destination, Port Nelson. The only people so far installed there were a survey party, and our arrival gave them a surprise. We looked like nothing on earth; none of us having shaved since we started on our journey, and our clothes having suffered greatly

on the way. We certainly didn't look like Mounties—members of that smart-looking force.

But we didn't care how we looked. The only thing we cared about was getting a meal—a damned good feed—and getting it quickly. We had been a long time on short rations; so short, in fact, that in the end it had amounted to none at all. And the enormous meal that we had at the expense of those surveyors was the most wonderful of our lives.

CHAPTER XIV

CONSTRUCTION CAMP

WE erected a tent, and for many days afterwards that tent was our home, police station, office, and everything else. We stuck up a board outside and inscribed it:

R. N. W. M. POLICE

Merely a few letters on a rough board!—but impressive all the same.

Port Nelson was a real outpost. In those very early days the surveyors and us Mounties comprised the whole population—less than twenty all told. Everywhere was a barrenness of snow and stunted trees. The trees were a kind of pine, and though perhaps a hundred years old were seldom more than 10 or 12 feet high. Hard Arctic winds and poorness of soil were no doubt the cause of their hindered growth. They made the landscape look terribly desolate, and travelling through them was exceedingly monotonous. They were all so exactly alike. As the trail wound along, one's eyes constantly sought for change of scene—demanded it, indeed. You felt that the sameness could not possibly continue, yet it did. Most men who went on the trail through those dwarfish trees, complained of them getting on their nerves. It was easy country in which to get lost once away from the beaten track.

Adjoining the mouth of the Nelson River was the Hayes River, and on this was a Hudson Bay post known as York Factory. The distance from our camp was about 14 miles—7 miles diagonally across the Nelson, and then 7 miles of land trail to the Hayes. The Hudson Bay people, however, lived more or less in a world of their own, and we had little to do with them. The nearest police post was at Fort Churchill, 180 miles to the north; it was the first point of contact between the police and the Eskimos. For all practical purposes, therefore, we Mounties who had made the long river trail from the south were the only representatives of law and order over a very large stretch of country indeed.

Soon after our arrival the Superintendent from Fort Churchill paid us a visit. When he returned, the Superintendent took Constable Rogers back with him, thus leaving only Sergeant Walker and myself at Port Nelson. This did not worry us at the time, as our duties were very light, owing to the population being so small. But presently the population began rapidly to increase. Ships came, bringing workmen of all kinds; tents and huts sprang up all over the place. Great quantities of stores, equipment, and materials were landed. The foreshore became covered with piles and planks for the wonderful pier that was to be built. Huge cranes, in sections, were landed, and other machinery of various sorts. I might mention here that the endeavour to make a proper port of Port Nelson in the end failed completely. This was chiefly because of the unsheltered position of the place, the ice, and other rigorous conditions in

winter. After some years of effort, accordingly, the attempt was finally abandoned, and to-day, the place consists of no more than a number of half-finished ruins.

In our day, however, from all over the south came men looking for employment. In their dozens they made the long journey overland. Most of them were Italians, and other southern Europeans, but I should think every other race under the sun was represented. In much the same way that men flocked to the Yukon gold-rush, they poured into Port Nelson.

The new arrivals carried their possessions on their backs, and many came near to starving to death on the way. Perhaps some did, in fact, starve, and were never heard of again. Some were certainly driven to subsist as best they could on corn and tallow, and I saw many a man arrive there a terrible wreck. They had travelled some hundreds of miles—anything from five hundred to a thousand—tramping the bitter wastes day after day, week after week.

And all that tale of suffering and privation merely to get a job! It's easy to understand how the promise of wealth—even a remote chance of it—could cause men to set out to face the dangers and rigours of a long trail; but it's pathetic to think that they would undertake it in the hope of getting a simple daily or weekly wage. Such a state of affairs is a sad comment on economic conditions.

Our duties soon began to multiply. Important among them was the administration of the liquor laws. Canada was not a "dry" country, but they had a law that liquor was to be prohibited in

construction camps and their vicinity. The idea of this was to keep such camps in a more orderly condition than they might have been if liquor were available. The law also aimed at preventing the Indians having possibly an easy access to liquor. Indians were always hanging round construction camps, and would give their very souls for alcohol.

Another duty we had was that of searching for, and helping, job-seekers who had got lost, or were in other distress on the trail from the south. Sometimes we found these men within an hour or two's journey of Port Nelson, and at other times it was a task taking two or three days.

One poor devil of a man whom Sergeant Walker brought in was in such a bad way from frost-bite that two of his toes had to be amputated. He was a half-breed, and before the frost got him he had been foodless for two days, so that altogether he was in a pretty bad way. Among the people then at Port Nelson there was a doctor, but there was no anæsthetist, or even a nurse. I myself, therefore, was deputed to be the one to administer the chloroform for the operation. This was not because I had had any special medical training or anything of that sort, but simply that I was a Mountie, and Mounties had to be ready for every emergency.

The doctor made a chloroform mask of gauze and cotton-wool, poured on the chloroform and showed me how to hold it over the man's face, and how to watch his eyes and pulse. It was a far from pleasant job. There was no hospital, of course; we hadn't even a proper bed for the patient. But we managed everything and the man duly recovered in fine style.

I don't know if others who have been called upon to act as amateur anæsthetists have felt about it as I did, but I must say that the thing that made the greatest claim on my attention at the time was the actual operation of the doctor cutting off the man's toe, tying up the blood vessels, and so on. Instead of watching the man's eyes and pulse, I was constantly tempted to watch the doctor. There was something strangely fascinating in the skilful way in which he cut and handled the living flesh.

Still, life was not always grim like that; it never is. And we had plenty of lighter moments. One such concerned the arrival at the police station one day of a man I had known very well in Nigeria. He came to make an inquiry about getting a permit to shoot ptarmigan, and did not recognize me. As the weather was bitterly cold and I was in furs with only my eyes showing, the idea came to me to play a joke on the other.

On the man making his inquiry about the permit, I regarded him sternly and addressed him:

"Isn't your name Harold Drake Pemberton?" I made my tone extremely cold and official.

The other gave a start and looked at me sharply.

"Why, yes; that's my name. How did you know?"

"It's the *business* of the police to know things. You used to live in Nigeria." I shot the words at him.

"Yes; but——"

"Didn't you live with a native girl named Bali?" I was bringing to my mind everything I could remember about him.

The astonishment on the applicant's face was

growing with every second. "That's right; but there's no harm in that, is there?"

"And didn't you send her back to her father after a year, and get a younger girl?"

Pemberton's astonishment was so great by then that he could hardly speak. He was a big lump of a man with one of those smooth, fat faces that crease quickly in response to emotions. I could hardly keep from bursting out laughing at his amazed expression.

"I wanted to make sure you really are Harold Drake Pemberton," I said very sternly. "Now, listen to me, and answer carefully. Did you know a man called Ernest Hyatt in Nigeria?"

"Yes; I knew him very well. He's dead."

"Dead—is he? How did he die?"

"He died of blackwater fever at Lokoja. I was over the border in Sierra Leone at the time; but I heard about it. But, here, I say, Mountie——"

"You swear that you were in Sierra Leone when this man Ernest Hyatt died? Be careful how you answer." The business of holding back my laughter was so great a strain that I had to look away for a moment.

"Of course I can swear it!" The other began to bluster. "See here, Mountie, what the hell are you getting at? Do you think I had a hand in——"

"You would know this man Hyatt if you saw him?"

"How can I see him when he's dead!"

I could continue the thing no longer.

"Is this like him?" I said, and dropped my fur collar and swept off my head-covering, revealing the whole of my face.

Pemberton stepped back. "Good God!" he gasped. "Then you're not dead at all!" He gasped again. "They didn't bury you at Lokoja!" he went on, as though making quite sure of the matter.

"No," I said, grinning, "the report of my death was gravely exaggerated." It was an old joke of Mark Twain's, but my friend hadn't heard it before, and he appreciated it immensely.

"I must say, Ernest, you had me guessing properly!" he told me later. "I had the wind up quite a bit, thinking you might have got on to something you could *really* get me for. . . ."

On another occasion a surveyor reported to me that someone had sent him a case of gin by one of the ships. He wanted to know what he ought to do with it. I was alone in the Police Camp at the time, the Sergeant being out on patrol, and I gravely considered the matter. The surveyor sat there, waiting anxiously. He liked a drink, but hadn't had one for many weeks. Neither had I. The case contained twelve stone bottles of liquor; in such a place, under such conditions, it was a truly noble quantity. I felt it was rather a heavy responsibility. Nevertheless, I explained that the law was the law, and that the liquor would have to be confiscated. I, myself, would confiscate it.

The surveyor looked very disappointed. He was a splendid chap, in a responsible position, and a very good friend of mine. I had not quite finished all I had to say, however. As we parted, I hinted that after I had confiscated the liquor I would be very glad if he would come and visit me as often as he wished. It was all very sedate and

subtle. . . . That case of gin lasted us for months. It was the only liquor consumed at Port Nelson during my time there.

With the rapidly growing importance of Port Nelson, it soon became necessary for us to have reinforcements, a better equipment, and so forth. Five Mounties were sent to us, therefore, from Regina, together with a motor whale-boat from Fort Churchill. The latter was for carrying us on our duties in and about the mouth of the river; and very useful it was, too.

From Fort Churchill, also, we obtained a dog-team and sledge. This was a very welcome acquisition, and we made numbers of quite long journeys with it—even as far as 240 miles back to the police post at Split Lake, the place where on our long canoe journey by river, we stayed the night with the two Mounties. I must say, though, that sledging—involving as it did a lot of running behind the sledge—was at first terribly tiring work. At the end of the day my legs were stiff and sore as though I had been beaten with a stick.

Often it was a case of the man being the best dog, as a saying common among sledgers went. In coming down a frozen slope, the man had to see that the sledge did not overrun the dogs. To overrun them in this way might mean killing some, to say nothing of maiming others, and altogether making a terrible mess of the whole show. Many a time I had to throw my full weight back on the rope at the rear end of the sledge, and thus attempt to check its downward rush. Those were tense moments of strain and struggle. Acting as a human brake was no fun.

Again, on ascending a slope, or even in heavy going on the level, one often had to take the rope and help the sledge along. This, also, was very wearying work. Then, too, there was the work of "breaking trail." This meant that we had come to a place where there was no trail, and one of us had to go ahead and, in his snowshoes, beat out a path through the untrodden snow. The snowshoes padded down the snow, making a more solid surface for the sledge.

Oh, yes; sledging was definitely not a matter of sitting on the sledge and riding easily along. Indeed, one never rode on the sledge at all, unless it was empty, which wasn't very often.

On one sledge trip I had an experience with wolves.

I was returning from a patrol to an outlying camp, where it had been reported to me that wolves had been breaking into the camp's stores. The men had only just arrived, and there had not been time to build a cache—a high platform, on which the stores could be kept safe against attack. As I went along in the dusk with my dogs and sledge, I chanced to look behind me, to find that I was being followed by a pack of wolves.

The moment I stopped, the wolves stopped as well; but directly I moved on again, they came loping after me. The beasts looked very grim and determined, and somehow the fact that it was nearly dark made them seem very evil indeed.

This was my first experience of the kind, and I had to decide quickly what to do. I had a gun, but it was only a single-barrelled shotgun, and I had only four cartridges. I had been shooting

some ptarmigan, and had used up most of my ammunition.

I fired at the wolves, but to no effect. Accordingly, the remaining cartridges I cut nearly through just below the charge, so that at close range the effect would be more like that of a bullet than a spread of shot. The wolves came on and on. Again I asked myself what I should do—cut one of the dogs loose for them to feed on, or what?

At last an idea came to me. The wolves were very close by then, and at any moment it might be a case of using those remaining cartridges in an attempt to check a rush. Opening the canvas cover of the sledge, however, I took out some of the ptarmigan I had shot, and split them open with my knife so as to expose the viscera and blood. Then I dropped the carcasses at short intervals on the trail behind me.

The wolves pounced on the ptarmigan, and were so intent on fighting among themselves that they forgot about me. I beat it while the going was good. The dogs never travelled so fast in all their lives, and I got back to the police detachment without further trouble.

Those dogs were real huskies, and good, strong workers. Yet, somehow, it was hard to take to the animals as one might take to other dogs. I am as fond of dogs as the next man, but I never quite knew where I stood with the huskies. There was a good deal of the wolf in them, and they were always inclined to be surly and suspicious. They didn't respond to human affection nearly as much as one would have liked. You could go so far with them, but definitely no farther.

One had always to watch the huskies. The moment the sledge stopped, or when they were being unharnessed, we had to jump to it to see that they did not eat their harness, which was made of sealskin, a substance they were very fond of. (I might mention that this was not the sealskin so valued for ladies' coats; the seals were not fur seals, but another kind.) The moment a husky got a chance he would snap at the harness; and it was remarkable how much of it he could devour in a short space of time.

The huskies, also, were always ready to fight with other dog-teams. On the trail, Indian trappers and others with teams always kept well away from our own if they saw it coming. The Indians' dogs were inferior to ours, being less sturdy and rather mangy-looking; and it seemed to be the ambition of every dog in our lot to have an opportunity for mopping them up. At such meetings on the trail we tried to keep our dogs apart from the others; but only too often the animals took command of the situation, and then there was a regular dust-up—dogs, harness, sledges and everything, in one great riot!

The air would be filled with the sound of snarling, barking and yelping. The beasts all seemed to go utterly mad. They flew at the Indians' dogs as though they had at last come upon life-long enemies. They slavered, and their lips were right back as they struck with their gleaming fangs. The Indian dogs fought back as viciously, though maybe not so strongly. On both sides blood and hair flew. There were yelps of pain; and deep, guttural growlings as a dog, his teeth buried in



BOAT DRILL ON R.N.W.M. POLICE SCHOONER

[see page 231]



SALMON TROUT CAUGHT IN SPURREL'S HARBOUR,
HUDSON BAY

Two Eskimos and (centre) Ship's Cook

[see page 235]



ESKIMO IGLOO, SPURREL'S HARBOUR

[see page 235]



R.N.W.M. POLICEMAN ON PATROL DUTY, FORT CHURCHILL

[see page 234]

another throat, shook his head fiercely and strove to make his grip stronger and deeper still. The snow of the trail became all scurried, and its whiteness stained with blood. Often in the excitement a dog attacked a member of his own team, so that besides the general battle, as it were, there were various little private fights going on.

It was dog-fighting on a fine, large scale indeed—a striking bit of life and strenuous activity to come across in the midst of the snowy wastes!

Stopping such a *mêlée* was exceedingly dangerous. But it had to be done, somehow. We used to wade in, and with sticks or anything that was handy separate the struggling animals. How I escaped being severely bitten is really a miracle. The huskies were unfriendly enough to man at any time, but at times like those—well, it would have been a mere nothing for one or more of them to have fastened his teeth in my legs, or even higher up. I know of numbers of cases of men being bitten by fighting huskies, and very bad wounds some of them were, too. An African big game hunter, who had had some experience also of Arctic sledging, told me he would rather face a charging rhinoceros than have the job of stopping a battle between two teams of huskies.

The wolf strain in the husky was always ready to flare up in full control. One of the men at the construction camp at Port Nelson had brought a little fox-terrier with him. He had had the animal for a long time, and it was very much of a pet. One day the dog wandered over near the police camp, and the huskies, released from their day's duties, spotted it. With a hoarse baying they

rushed forward, and in a minute the poor little fox-terrier had been torn to pieces. The police dogs had never seen one of their kind like that before; perhaps they didn't think it was a dog at all, but some sort of new creature. It was the most prompt and utter annihilation imaginable.

None the less, savage and uncertain-tempered as they were, I knew them to perform the most kindly acts one to another.

Those dogs were as much on the staff of the Police Force as we were ourselves. They had their regimental numbers and names; when they became too old to work, or grew snow-blind—as they often did—they were pensioned off and allowed to live a life of ease. There were always one or two of these blind or old pensioners in the camp.

One day a horse employed in the construction work died of frozen lungs—a trouble that was a frequent occurrence—and the body was taken a little way from the camp and left there. The police dogs, on being released at the end of the day, promptly found the dead horse and proceeded to have a thorough gorge. I might mention that the huskies had a daily allowance of frozen fish, which was supposed to be sufficient for them; nevertheless, they always seemed hungry.

For an hour or more, then, the huskies fed on the horse, having the time of their lives. When at length they began to wander back to the camp, I noticed one of them carrying in his mouth a piece of the dead animal's leg. I thought the husky was bringing the fragment home to bury it for a future occasion. But no; he had brought it for a pensioner dog too old to join in the general

scramble that had just taken place. There was something very moving about the way that beast laid the piece of meat at his old comrade's feet.

Another time I was attracted by the strange behaviour of two huskies crossing a narrow bridge across a creek that separated the dogs' quarters from our camp. They were one behind the other, and the dog in the rear kept nosing the other one along the flank, first one side and then the other. Now and then the dog in front would halt in a nervous kind of way; whereupon the other dog would butt him forward very gently, and the first dog would resume his progress, which had about it a queer appearance of uncertainty. It was not until I was close enough to recognize the two dogs, that I knew what was happening. The first dog was snow-blind, and his companion was guiding him safely across the bridge!

We, ourselves, soon had to have better quarters than a tent, and in due course one of the ships brought us three large huts, in sections. We transferred into one as soon as it was erected, but very soon wished that we hadn't. The wood was green, and though the sections fitted very well when the hut was first put together, it all presently began to warp, and the snow and wind came in through numerous cracks. It was the middle of winter then, with the temperature some forty degrees below zero! And how we cursed that gimcrack hut! No amount of heating would keep it warm. We would wake in the early hours of the morning to find piles of snow on our blankets, to say nothing of icicles hanging about everywhere. How we came through some of the nights in that hut I don't

know. We must have been physically very tough indeed.

Occasionally one or other of us made the trip over to York Factory, the Hudson Bay Company's post on the Hayes River. Usually we went to get some stores or clothing that we needed. One trip that I made was to get some warm underclothing; however, the only things of the kind they had left in stock were ladies' combinations. I had to make-do with those, notwithstanding the fact that they fitted me very oddly, being too wide in the hips and having let-in pieces on the breasts. Still, I had once been a sailor, and sailors notoriously don't care!

York Factory was a wonderful old place. In design it was of three stories, with two wings and an inner courtyard, where in time of siege women and children and others could shelter. There was a look-out tower, giving a clear view of the surrounding country. The whole building was some 150 years old, and the wood of which it was constructed, and the carpenters who erected it, had both come from Scotland. Altogether, it was a faithful solid piece of work, and represented a definite period in pioneering history.

In the old days York Factory had often been attacked by the French and by Indians. I saw some of the old cannons there, with piles of round-shot still beside them. To visualize the spot at a time of siege was easy. Just to stand there was like being back a century and a-half in history. Everything had been very little altered since the early times.

In much the same fashion the method of trading

at the Factory was but little changed. The "height of a rifle" system was still in use. This meant that, when an Indian wanted a rifle or shotgun, he had to bring sufficient skins—beaver, fox, or whatever he had—to make a heap as high as the particular gun he wanted. If he wanted a long-barrelled weapon, he had to bring a very great number of skins. I noticed that most of the weapons for sale in the store had long barrels.

Presumably, if an Indian wanted a short carbine, efforts would be made to persuade him of the greater advantages of the longer-barrelled weapon. Most of the long-barrelled guns were of the cheap "gas-pipe" order, and the short carbines were more costly. But it is the art of the trader the world over to get as much as he can for as little as possible.

The Indians, however, were always quite content with the deal. A few extra skins meant nothing to them.

CHAPTER XV

A PRISONER OR TWO

NATURALLY enough, with so many men at Port Nelson there was bound to be a bit of trouble now and then.

On one occasion there was a strike, and the strikers threatened to burn the whole camp down. There were only two of us Mounties in the place at the time, and the situation was a ticklish one. The trouble-makers were men of all nationalities, and there were plenty of "tough guys" among them. Altogether, there were some two hundred strikers, and on the face of it it looked as if we two Mounties wouldn't have much of a chance against such overwhelming odds.

However, the camp wasn't burnt down after all, and we hadn't much difficulty in suppressing such disorders as arose. And for why? It was the prestige of the North-West Mounted Police that turned the scale. The prestige of that force was remarkable; no parallel can be found for it in any other police organization in the world. Its sway was much like that of a white man in native countries—Nigeria, for example; the place whence I had so recently come. During that strike trouble, we two Mounties merely patrolled the place with revolvers. The knowledge that the North-West Police was present was enough. It was not us two

men that the malcontents feared, but the North-West Police force itself.

One day a ship came into the Bay, and it was reported that there was a mutiny on board. It was asked if there were any police on shore, and accordingly I went off to the vessel.

The vessel in question was a dirty old tramp steamer, with a certain mean look that quickly catches the eye of a sailor. As I went up the gangway from the boat which had brought me off from the shore, members of the ship's people stared at me from down over the rail. I was in full uniform, stetson, scarlet jacket, riding-boots, Sam Browne belt and all, and no doubt made a lordly bit of colour in the midst of those drab surroundings.

The captain, a mean-faced Welshman, greeted me as I stepped on board.

"I didn't know the North-West Mounted were up here, indeed to goodness!"

"We fellows are everywhere," I said. "What's the trouble?"

We went into the skipper's cabin, and he gave me a drink—a very small one; after which I learned that the "mutiny" was confined to one man refusing duty. The captain was afraid, however, that this man might stir up discontent among the others of the crew.

"All right," I decided. "Have the man brought in, and I'll hear what he has to say."

The mutineer proved to be an Englishman of about thirty-five. One glance was enough to tell me that he was a type of first-class seaman. Indeed, he appeared to have much more character, and to be a better man all round, than the captain. In

answer to my questions, the sailor told me that his name was Oliver and that he came from Gravesend. He had refused duty because the mate had a grouch against him, and had been making his life an absolute hell. Mates on tramp steamers such as that, as I knew, could easily make it extremely uncomfortable for an A.B. whom they didn't like. In my own knocking about the world on various ships I'd seen it happen only too often.

"And she's a mean ship, sir," Oliver added. "The men are underfed and overworked. I've had enough of 'er. I've told the crowd for'd they're fools to stick it like they do."

I looked at the fellow steadily.

"This is a very serious matter—refusing duty and inciting to mutiny. You could get three years for it. You'd better go for'd again and think it over."

He shook his head.

"I'm not doing another hand's turn about 'er. You don't know what sort of ship she is, sir."

"You can't tell me anything about that," I said. "I'm an old seafaring man myself. Now, off you go for'd and think it over."

He went, but soon returned—with his kitbag all packed.

"I don't care what happens to me ashore, sir. I only want to get off this blasted old hooker."

There was, therefore, nothing for it but to arrest the man and take him ashore, and let the ship sail without him. After I had landed, however, the question arose as to what we were to do with the prisoner.

There was no magistrate at Port Nelson, and

though in extreme cases our Sergeant had power to pronounce sentences of imprisonment up to six months, he was chary about taking this step. Summary judgment of that kind would mean a lot of explanations and correspondence later to headquarters, with always the chance that superiors would be dissatisfied at the action and administer a reprimand. And, indeed, one could not but have the feeling that there was something just a little illegal about a non-commissioned officer inflicting such punishments. Yet the only other alternative was to arrest, release, and re-arrest the man every 24 hours; it being the law that no prisoner arrested in the absence of a warrant could be held more than 24 hours without being brought before an examining magistrate. But, again, as we might have had to continue the arresting and re-arresting business every day for months—until a magistrate appeared—the whole thing was absurd. Consequently, in the end the Sergeant took the risk and sentenced Oliver to six months. Since, however, there was no prison available, the Sergeant contented himself by fastening a chain and ball to the captive's ankle.

Oliver certainly proved himself a most agreeable prisoner. He was so delighted at being ashore away from that ship, that he regarded us as benefactors. He willingly cut firewood for us, and did our chores. He was the happiest prisoner that ever was, and his six months rapidly went by. At the end of that time some of us clubbed together and got an outfit for the chap, and set him up as a trapper. Trapping was an occupation which suited him very well, and out of it he made—and

I believe is still making—a deal of money; much more than most trappers. In originally taking that man from that ship, therefore, I was shaping his life for him better than either of us knew.

Another helpful prisoner that we had was a young mechanic, whom we were holding in connection with a theft. His offence wasn't a very serious one. It was no more than a matter of a momentary temptation, into which any man might fall. I liked the fellow, and we got on well together. By that time we were building a proper police post, with barracks, cells, armoury, and the rest; and the young man was very helpful in squaring the logs for building, and in the construction work generally.

He very nearly lost his life at the work, however. He and I had been up the river for a bit in a canoe, and were returning with some timber, when he made some awkward movement or other, and the frail craft capsized. It was bitterly cold, and the shock of being thrown suddenly into the water was breath-taking. The iciness seemed to shoot clean through me. The canoe swung out of our reach and I started to swim for the shore.

I suddenly realized, then, that my companion couldn't swim. He was floundering around, not only cold but drowning. The poor devil's face was blue, and there was a horrible fear in his eyes. He splashed around beating the water vainly, and uttering gurgling cries. I swam over to him, grasped him by the collar, and began to pull him towards the shore. What with the cold and all the rest of it, it had been difficult enough going before; but now it was an infinite labour.

The young man struggled. I shouted at him to keep still; but what's the use of shouting out to a fellow who is nearly drowning? The water seemed to be getting colder every minute, and the shore to be getting no nearer. I began to fear that we should both be drowned, and resolved that if the other continued his struggling I would try to knock him unconscious by a heavy blow on the point of the jaw. I had heard of this being done with drowning men; but how, under present circumstances, I was going to manage it, I was by no means sure. At least part of my arm would have to travel through the freezing water, which would rob the blow of much of its effect.

The outlook grew blacker and blacker. Until, just as I was about to attempt the difficult expedient of a blow, my foot touched the bottom. A moment later we were mercifully out of the water and up the bank. As soon as my prisoner had recovered sufficiently, we made for home as hard as we could in order to get the blood circulating again.

There was another individual we should all have very much liked to make prisoner, but for one reason or another we just couldn't dovetail the evidence properly against him. He was an Austrian, but one of the most horrible men I have ever known. His occupation was that of a horse teamster, and one of the things we knew him to be guilty of, but were unable definitely to prove against him, was bestiality in a very dreadful form.

I did, however, at length manage to get this man for being in possession of a revolver without a licence. It appeared that by flourishing a revolver about he had frightened some of the other construc-

tion workers, and on a complaint reaching us I was sent to attend to the matter.

The Austrian looked at me scowlingly when I came up to him.

"Hand over that revolver," I said.

The fellow pretended he didn't understand, and I repeated the command.

With that the other put his hand to his belt as though to pass the weapon to me. But there was something in the look of his eyes, and also in the way his hand was going to the weapon, that warned me to watch out. I saw that, instead of drawing the gun so as to give it to me butt first, he was intending to hold me up, if nothing worse.

My own hand went even quicker to my belt, and to the revolver that hung there.

For a moment the Austrian stood there eyeing me; then his eyes dropped and he slowly handed the revolver, butt first, over to me. I served a summons on him for carrying an unlicensed weapon, and he was eventually fined a few dollars.

The man swore that he would "get" me for what I had done, and some time later an episode certainly occurred. As I was standing with another Mountie near the barracks, a bullet suddenly whizzed between us. There were some bushes near by, and the shot had come from among them. I felt convinced that it was my enemy the Austrian, but though we hunted around we couldn't quite get sufficient evidence, and there for the time the matter remained.

The Austrian's bestial practices, as we knew, continued. There was not a man in the whole of Port Nelson who would not have been glad to see

the last of him. At length, the man came to us to see if we would help him with the papers necessary for him to leave Canada and return to Austria. The war-clouds were gathering in Europe, and he was afraid that if the war broke out he would, if he remained in Canada, be interned.

That was our golden opportunity to be rid of the fellow, but we had no intention, on the other hand, of letting him escape punishment for his unconvicted crimes. He was told to come back next day, when the necessary papers would be ready for him. These papers, he was told, he would have to hand in at Police Headquarters, at a place called The Pas, away to the south.

We got the papers ready, but they were far from being what the Austrian imagined. They were, in fact, sworn statements regarding the other's evil behaviour at Port Nelson. For the position was that while up there at Port Nelson we could not do very much against the man, those sworn statements would be quite enough for the authorities at The Pas to take action upon.

I watched the Austrian's face as the sealed packet was handed to him.

"You are going by way of The Pas?" he was asked.

"Ya!" he answered, nodding. His wicked eyes were twinkling; no doubt he thought we were a lot of fools.

"You must be careful not to lose the papers on the way," the man was told. "They are very important."

"Ach, I tak great care of dem. I not such a fool to lose them."

Our Sergeant nodded.

"That's right. Not such a fool. I hope you get through to The Pas all right."

The Austrian certainly reached his destination all right, and handed in the sealed envelope of documents. The result was that he got three years imprisonment. All the way, therefore, on the long trail south he had unknowingly been carrying what was virtually a warrant for his own arrest.

On the whole, nevertheless, crime at Port Nelson was not very common. Still, on occasion, we had our little mysteries to solve—sometimes with results that were entirely unexpected.

Once it was reported to us that the three cooks in one of the construction camps had been poisoned. When another constable and myself went round to the camp, we found the three men undoubtedly in a bad way. On the other hand, it was clear that the poison which they had taken was self-administered. The men were simply hopelessly drunk!

At once the question arose: Where had the cooks obtained the liquor? As I have already explained, liquor was forbidden, under very heavy penalties, in a construction camp. It looked as though someone were bringing in the stuff on the sly, and judging from the state of the three men, bringing it in in quantity.

We hunted round, looking for the empty bottles, or other evidence that might put us on the track of the supposed trouble. We interviewed numbers of the men, but no one seemed able to throw any light on the matter. Altogether, the affair was most annoying. I liked a drink as well as the next fellow, but as a member of the police I didn't like to think

that there might be a gang of smugglers beating us in that way.

And then it dawned on me that perhaps in actual fact such was not the explanation at all. I noticed, when I went near the three drunken men, that as they lay in their semi-conscious state, there was a strong smell of lemons. This led me to have yet another look round the kitchen, and with that the whole mystery was all at once solved.

Three pint bottles of lemon essence, which should have been full, were empty. Now, lemon essence contained a large percentage of proof spirit, and on those three pints of the stuff the three cooks had had a first-class binge. . . . It very near killed them, though.

There was another little mystery with an unexpected twist, when a man who lived in a house a short distance from the main camp reported that a quantity of food had been stolen.

It was not far off Christmas, and the food consisted of some which had been got in for that occasion—a side of bacon, and a goose. These had been hung in the porch of the shack. During the night the man had been awakened by the sound of stealthy steps about the porch, and the brushing of someone against the side of the house. Arming himself with a gun, therefore, the householder sat up and waited for further developments; but nothing more happened. In the morning, however, he found that the whole of the food which had been hanging up in the porch had gone. There had also been a light fall of snow, which had effectively covered the thief's tracks.

The theft in itself was not of very great import-

ance; none the less, we were interested to know who was responsible. It is a feature of small, remote places that even the most trifling event has its importance. After searching for some time without any result, we might never have reached the solution had not one of us stumbled on a footprint that the light fall of snow had not quite covered. It was quite near to the house, and nothing less than that of a brown bear!

Careful hunting, thereupon, revealed other footprints roundabout the porch, and to clinch the matter we found a few hairs of the bear's fur where he had brushed against the wall. There were numbers of brown bears in the vicinity of Port Nelson, but for being so daring as to come right in and steal from the porch of a man's dwelling—well, I reckon that animal deserved that Christmas dinner. . . !

As I have already said, our life was not all a matter of maintaining law and order. We Mounties had to be ready to help our fellow-men in pretty well every way known to mankind.

There was an occasion when it was reported that an Indian girl was dying of consumption in an Indian encampment at Port Nelson, and I went along to inspect. The girl was in the early twenties and her history was a tragic one.

Some three years before, she had left her tribe to become the mistress of a white man—a trapper who lived some way down the coast. She contracted tuberculosis, as so many Indians do, and when later the man moved to another district, he refused to take her with him, and sent her back to her tribe. The trapper must have been an utterly



NARROWEST PART OF RIVER TIGRIS

[see page 268]



RIVER GUNBOAT *BLACKFLY* AT BAGHDAD

Author was in command during most of trouble on Euphrates
and Tigris

[see page 244]



SHEIKH SALEM OF CHIBAISH, HAMAR LAKE,
MESOPOTAMIA

[see page 269]



SHEIKH JUAD OF JALANI, WHO TENDED BRITISH
CEMETETERIES ABOVE BAGHDAD

[see page 280]

unfeeling brute; incidentally, also, the sort of man, who, among backward races, is a cause more than anything else of lowering the white man's prestige. This girl might have been only an Indian; but she had given three of the best years of her life to the other, looking after him to the best of her ability, and she certainly deserved better than to be kicked out just because she was ill. As she lay there in the wigwam, thin, flushed, coughing, I felt that if I could have got hold of that trapper I'd have given him something to get along with.

The sick girl was good-looking for an Indian, with dark, lustrous eyes; but the disease had got such a hold that you could see that she was literally dying while you watched. I took her some tinned milk and other food two or three times a day, and fed it to her. The wigwam was an affair of skins built round a framework of sticks in the usual manner, and was dirty and smelly. There was a bit of a smoky fire in the middle of the floor. The girl lay on a pile of skins and old clothing. Her relatives and a number of other Indians sat around on the ground. For the most part they were silent—half-shadowy figures in the misty atmosphere.

Several of the women in the tent had children with them; one, I remember was an infant at the breast. Once, when I put the tin of milk down in the course of feeding the sick girl, an Indian child crept up, stuck his finger into the tin and licked it. Twice he did this, before, on my suddenly turning to him, he dashed back to his mother.

The girl for the most part lay without speaking. She kept her eyes upon me. She seemed so frail, so wraith-like, that—well, it just tore at my heart.

For three or four days I went along as best I could, taking food to the sufferer and tending her in various ways. Until, one afternoon, as I sat there beside the sick-bed, the end came. Yet, although I had known it was not far off, somehow I was not expecting it just then.

For some time the girl had lain without moving, so that I thought she was asleep. The Indians in the wigwam were also sitting very quiet and still. Suddenly the dying girl opened her eyes and turned her head towards me. I saw that she was trying to speak, so I leaned nearer. Her lips moved, but the sound that came from them was so faint that had I not been listening intently I might not have caught it.

"T'ank you!" she said.

Then, looking towards the other Indians, she whispered in her own language a word which I learned later was the Indian one for farewell. After that her eyes closed again, she lapsed into unconsciousness, and in a few minutes she was no more.

The funeral took place a few days later. The coffin was made of boxes, and the hearse was a sledge drawn by men. It was midwinter, the temperature was thirty degrees below zero, and the grave had to be blasted out by dynamite in the frozen ground. All the Indians of the district attended, while the missionary from York Factory, the Hudson Bay Post, conducted the service. The missionary had on his white surplice, but under it he was clad in furs.

But by none of those things was I so moved as by the pathos of that last whispered: "T'ank you!"

CHAPTER XVI

. FARTHER NORTH

MY most strenuous time as a member of the North-West Mounted Police in the cold north, was in connection with an expedition to arrest some Eskimo murderers.

These Eskimos inhabited a region somewhere to the north of Baker Lake, at the head of Chesterfield Inlet; which, as can be seen by a glance at a map, was right away up the Hudson Bay, some hundreds of miles north of Port Nelson, where I was stationed. The men the Eskimos had killed were two whites named Radford and Street, who had gone up into the Arctic with dog-teams and supplies, intending to cross the continent, and at the same time prospect for metals or anything else there might be to discover. The white men, it appeared, had quarrelled at some point on the march with their native guides and thrashed one or more of the Eskimos with a dog-whip. This had engendered much bad blood, and later, after watching for their chance, the guides had taken their spears and stabbed the two whites to death.

On the news reaching civilization, Inspector Beyts of the North-West Mounted Police, who had had a lot of Arctic service, was sent up to a place in the Hudson Bay called Spurrel's Harbour. The schooner that had carried the Inspector then came on down to Port Nelson. This was just before the

freeze-up for winter, and the idea was that Beyts and his party should remain at Spurrel's Harbour until the open water came again; whereupon the schooner would return from Port Nelson with supplies, and take them up Chesterfield Inlet to Baker Lake, from where the party would proceed overland in search of the murderers.

Accordingly, on her arrival at Port Nelson the schooner was run up high and dry and put into winter quarters, when opportunity was taken to overhaul her. The crew was paid off and sent south by dog-teams and sleds, only the Captain and cook remaining behind. I had been told that I was to take command of the schooner when the time came for the journey north again. But as I did not know anything about the ice conditions in the far north, nor how the vessel handled in narrow waters, I was not keen on taking the responsibility of perhaps wrecking the old tub. Accordingly it was arranged that the Captain remained, and that I should go on the vessel as mate.

I have called the schooner an old tub—and so she was. Of all the cranky ships I have ever known, she was the worst. She looked as though she might have been built by one man in his spare time. Her lines were a cross between a church font and a bath, and on the wind she could easily make five miles leeway to one of headway. She was fitted with a Remington 3 cylinder, 50 h.p. kerosene engine; I was told it was the only engine of its kind in existence—for which I am very thankful. Moreover, the propeller shaft came out on the port quarter; a circumstance which made the vessel do her utmost to run into everything on her starboard

side. . . . Oh, yes, a lovely craft indeed! A fine vessel for use on a serious expedition! The North-West Mounted Police are not often caught napping, but I reckon the authorities must have been nodding when they were inveigled into chartering or purchasing such a wretched bag of tricks.

During the winter we put in a lot of time overhauling the schooner and fixing her up generally. On the journey up from Halifax, which had lasted about three months, the ship had been through a rough time; her fore-topmast was gone, and her engine was more or less in ruins. In fact, it was a mystery how she managed to complete that voyage at all. However, by persistence and ingenuity, the repairs were duly effected; and when the ice started to break up, we got new running gear rove off, and cleared the ice from round the hull. Then we discovered that the greenheart sheathing below the waterline wanted renewing, as half was missing, owing to its having been put on in Nova Scotia with small French nails. Fortunately, we discovered a man who had been in the vessel some years before, who was a splendid sailor and good carpenter, and the sheathing was renewed. This man was second mate and boatswain on our trip to Chesterfield later on.

We were then ready to launch the vessel from her high and dry position. But we soon found it wasn't easy. The craft had been run up on the highest tide of the year, and we couldn't move her an inch.

How we laboured at that job! At last someone had a brain-wave. The vessel lay alongside a log pier, built in connection with the making of the

harbour at Port Nelson, and on the pier was a rail-track. We passed a 15-inch hawser round our stern and made fast just under our counter, on which was a huge 3-fold purchase of 2-inch wire. The end of that wire we attached to the locomotives running on the rails on the pier. There were four of those locomotives, and furthermore we had a hawser from the mainmast made fast to a tug afloat some distance out.

Attempt after attempt we made, the locomotives snorting and the tug steaming ahead. The strain on the schooner was terrific. The decks opened up, the pitch flew out of the seams in showers. Indeed, I am sure that in those moments of stress the vessel was quite a different shape! Again and again the hawsers parted, and the locomotives, suddenly released, went tearing along the pier.

All this took place at night, when the tides were highest. And it was altogether an unpleasant experience to feel the deck bending under one's feet, to hear wires and ropes straining to breaking point, to know that any moment one might be received into the viciously curling coil of a suddenly broken wire hawser!

At last, however, we got the schooner safely off the land into the water, and towed out from the pier. But then, as the tug left us, we found to our consternation that our engine would only go astern! As a result, after steaming round stern first for a while, we hoisted our foresail, and ran once more ashore. There we careened the ship, in order to caulk the hull, which was leaking through the straining that had been received during the heavy ordeal of launching.

Next day, we sailed out to our anchorage—sailed, because we preferred to sail head-first rather than steam stern-first. After which we finished our refitting, persuaded the engine to behave properly, and commenced taking in ballast. Yet, even so, our troubles were not over by a long chalk. The engineer was filling a blow-lamp when its contents caught fire, and, finding it too hot to hold, the engineer dropped the lamp on to the engine-room floor, which was of wood and saturated with kerosene.

At once the whole engine-room was in a blaze. As we had three storage tanks containing several hundred gallons of kerosene in the engine-room, quick action was imperative. I happened to be looking down the engine-room skylight at the time, and as, fortunately, the crew were on deck filling water-barrels, we just emptied the water down on to the flames and succeeded in extinguishing them. In the absence of water, I should have used sand, though this probably would have meant that the engine would never have worked again. As will be seen later, a man would have been saved from serious injury if I had done this.

At last all was ready for sea, and away we went. But we hadn't got very far to sea before we were forced to turn back. We found ourselves stuck in a solid field of ice floes. Even from the masthead there was no visible opening ahead. For some time we tried to force our way along, but it was impossible. We returned, therefore, to our old anchorage off Port Nelson. It began to look as if our journey north would never be accomplished after all.

A week later, though it was blowing a gale, we hove up and once more proceeded to sea. We had a double-reefed foresail and mainsail, the engine working and the tide in our favour. Yet once again we were brought up all standing in a few hours' time by another field of floe ice. In spite of every effort we could make no headway, and so let go our anchor. Without a doubt, seafaring in a small and inadequate craft in the Hudson Bay was no picnic!

But there were loads of trouble in store for us yet. Soon after midnight we became aware that if we didn't shift our position darned quick, we were likely to be smashed to pieces. The ice field was travelling swiftly with the tide, and banging the vessel hard. The din was tremendous—a banging, sawing noise, most unpleasant to a sailor's ears. The night, too, was black as pitch and there was a heavy fog.

As we endeavoured to find a passage through the ice, we were like blind men seeking an unfamiliar road. We were unable to make out the ice even; we could only hear it. At intervals we would find an opening and made some progress; at other times we nosed on to a large mass of floes, were stopped, and had to try some other direction. As it was still blowing hard, we had made all sail fast and were using only the engine.

And then, about four in the morning, we were startled by a loud explosion, followed by sounds like that of tanks or tins being beaten with sticks. The engine was making an unusual knocking, and, on looking towards the engine-room, I saw the skylight lit with a red glow while clouds of smoke came

pouring up. I was out on the jibboom at the time, passing instructions to the helmsman, in order to clear any large ice ahead. By the time I got aft, a number of the crew were in the engine-room putting out the fire, and the chief engineer had been carried up on deck. The flesh was torn off the chief engineer's right leg, so that the bone was exposed. On the man's arms and other parts of his body were numerous other burns.

What had happened was that while the engine was running at full speed the governor spring broke, causing the engine to race so fast that the flywheel burst. The pieces flew all over the engine-room, smashing the compressed air pump and kerosene supply-tanks. As the engine was of the semi-Diesel type, the pressure of air was cut off from the torches when the air tank was broken, and the lighted oil streamed over the cylinders. The chief engineer, however, was the principal sufferer. In view of the fact that the second engineer and one of the crew were also in the engine-room at the time, it was a mystery how they escaped injury, especially from the flying pieces of metal.

After the fire had been put out we made all sail back to Port Nelson. In the meantime we did the best we could for the suffering chief engineer. It was a rough trip back, the strong wind being then dead ahead for us. Nevertheless, we managed it somehow—finding our way out of that ice-field and beating back to within six miles of the Port. There, soon after dawn, we anchored, and in response to our signals a tug came out. The chief engineer was taken ashore, and placed in the charge of the Government doctor. And thus, for

the second time, did we find ourselves back at Port Nelson.

Six days later we started off again. By way of a change, for as long as some four days, everything went well—or as well as could be expected in such a cranky craft in such a hostile stretch of sea. We began to think that the gods were beginning, if not exactly to smile upon us, at any rate to allow their stern visages to relax a little.

Alas, but our self-congratulation was short-lived! One morning, without the slightest warning, a squall from the north-east struck the ship. Before we could shorten sail the martingale carried away, the jibboom snapped off like a carrot, while all the headsails went overboard to leeward. With great difficulty we managed to get them aboard again, the ship's head having shot up into the wind all of a sudden. Fortunately, we were not very far from Fort Churchill, where it had been arranged we were to call and pick up various equipment for Inspector Beyts, who was awaiting us up at Spurrell's Harbour. We managed to limp into Fort Churchill and the necessary repairs were effected in due course. A few days afterwards, having taken on board an Esquimo pilot, a number of sledge dogs and various stores, we hove up again and proceeded on our much-delayed journey.

The charts for the northern part of the Hudson Bay were on a very small scale, and most unreliable. However, somehow or other we went along without encountering any serious difficulty until we sighted ahead a place called Marble Island. The island's name was derived from the fact that it was composed principally of white rock. As we drew

nearer to the island, it seemed that the wind had suddenly gone mad. It came at us from every point of the compass—ahead, astern, both sides, while just before that Marble Island was blotted out by snow squalls. We tacked and tacked, but could not keep the wind steady. The whole thing was truly a weird experience. I'd encountered all kinds of winds in my career, but never one like that. It gave one a feeling that there was something wrong with the world itself—a nasty, uncanny feeling.

When, finally, the squalls cleared, and we could see Marble Island again, it seemed that the place itself was also behaving strangely. Although the compass told us that we were lying steadily on one course, the island appeared to be shifting about! You would have thought it was afloat. It was sailing all round the place. However, we had begun, by then, to suspect what was really the matter. It was our compass that had gone wrong. It was being affected by a magnetic influence in the island. There was evidently a large quantity of lodestone there.

For some time after that we had to depend on the wind and soundings for our directions. The compass was utterly useless; moreover, there was no moon, nor were there any stars visible. Once we nearly came to grief on a low-lying reef, which was not marked on the chart. And it was only by tacking ship in a devil of a hurry that we were able to escape.

And so at last, after all sorts of misadventures, we arrived at our ultimate destination. Spurrell's Harbour was near the entrance to Chesterfield Inlet,

and was the last civilized post in the north. *Civilized*, did I say? It was no more than a matter of a few huts, some Esquimo igloos, a church and a whaling station. The whales were not real whales—I doubt if there are any such left in the Arctic—but much smaller creatures known as beluga, or white whales. They were in demand as food for sledge dogs. The station was in charge of a half-breed, who had spent nearly all his life in those regions.

The church was built of driftwood; it possessed an air of dignity, none the less. There was about the structure a note of sincerity that is only too often absent from imposing religious edifices. This little church was in the charge of two Europeans—a priest named Father Turquetil, and a lay brother. Father Turquetil was famous all over the north, and was a true and tried friend of both Esquimos and whites alike. He had spent many years in the Arctic, and been through all sorts of adventures and hardships, all of them endured with fine courage. I was no great lover of missionaries; but the courage and greatheartedness of men like Father Turquetil was something which could not be denied. It was a living, flaming force.

The Esquimos were a pleasant, good-natured lot, always ready to laugh. They were like children—children with adult bodies. Their features had a Mongolian cast, of course, but many were quite good-looking, even to our way of thinking. Many were very shy—the younger women particularly—and this shyness added to their attractiveness.

The igloos were built of blocks of frozen snow. I entered several. They were poorly furnished;

most of them had a shelf of frozen snow which was used as a kind of mantelpiece or table. For lighting purposes there were blubber lamps, with pieces of moss as wicks. A pile of skins served as a bed, and against the wall stood hunting spears and canoe paddles. Many of the cooking utensils were cans which once had contained preserved foods—meat-tins, jam-tins, and the like. One could not help feeling sorry for people having to live in such poor surroundings; yet they were happy enough. Happiness, very evidently, did not altogether depend upon environment and possessions.

We had arrived weeks late, of course. Inspector Beyts had given us up for lost, or at best, did not expect to see us till the following year. As the open water lasted only a few weeks, and we were so late in the season, the Captain of the schooner was not at all keen on attempting the long journey from the mouth of the Inlet up to Baker Lake. By reason of the fact that we had no engine and no chart, and also that no large vessel had ever been up the Inlet, the journey was particularly uninviting. On the other hand, the Inspector and his party were eager to reach Baker Lake and get their supplies under cover, after which the expedition into the interior would be continued with dogs and sleds.

My position during this period was rather an uncomfortable one. Being a policeman, I had to agree with the Inspector; but, also, being the Mate of the schooner, I had to agree with the Captain. The result was that I fell between two stools, each of my superiors thinking that I was giving my opinions against the other. It was most embarrassing for me.

It was finally decided that if all the ballast was discharged immediately, and the stores, petrol, tents, dogs, the Esquimo guide, etc., etc., were aboard by a certain time, the Captain would make the attempt to traverse the Inlet and get as near to Baker Lake as possible. Accordingly, we got a hustle on, and finally one morning hove-up anchor, set all sail, and started off.

Hour after hour we made our way along the Inlet against a head-wind, the while trusting to our Eskimo pilot to direct us. The pilot, however, seemed to be a very vague person; he had been up the Inlet in nothing larger than a ship's whale-boat, which was a very different proposition from taking up a craft the size of our own. Sometimes, when we were beating close to the shore, the Captain would ask the pilot if there were any rocks about, and for answer, the Esquimo would pick up the binoculars, look earnestly in the direction indicated, and after some moments of hard thinking, remark: "Maybe got 'em. Maybe not got 'em. Me no see." In other circumstances it might have been humorous; but in those restricted and little-known waters it was extremely dangerous and irritating.

The Inlet was about 180 miles long, with a width of 7 miles at the entrance; but after a few miles up, it very considerably narrowed. The surrounding country was all rock, ice and snow, with the only vegetation some moss and lichen. We hadn't reached very far before we were in difficulties. We anchored the first night under the lee of an island called Ellis Island, where we got 7 fathoms of water and our Esquimo pilot was sure there weren't any rocks. My watch was from 8 p.m. to midnight,

and I had constantly to walk up and down the deck in a very lively fashion to keep warm. The tide in the Inlet was very erratic. The water fell during the flood-tide, and rose during the ebb; this was due to the fresh-water coming down from Baker Lake and backing the salt-water. As we knew nothing about the tide, which at times ran at the rate of 12 miles an hour, it was essential to keep a sharp anchor watch.

After a time I noticed dark streaks on the water, and on taking a look through the glass I saw that our Esquimo pilot had been utterly wrong when he said there were no rocks present. Those dark streaks were rocks, and there were plenty of them. Rocks, indeed, were all round us; growing more and more distinct as the falling tide uncovered them.

At last, when the tide had gone right out, we found ourselves in the centre of a horseshoe-shaped reef. We were safely afloat, but how we had managed to come in through the narrow opening in the reef was a mystery. For once, our luck had been good. All we had to do was to lie there at anchor till the tide rose again and there was sufficient water to cover the rocks to a safe depth. This we did, and our journey was resumed.

That Inlet was certainly a crazy strip of water to navigate! It wound and deviated in the most annoying way. The depths varied with remarkable suddenness; at times there would be four, five, six fathoms, plenty of water, and the next moment it would be a matter of tricky steering to avoid grounding in the shallows. There was something unusually savage-looking about the rocks. You had a feeling that they were waiting to get you.

We bumped often enough, of course, though luckily not hard enough to cause serious damage.

Our alleged pilot became more and more hopeless and confused. He was guessing most of the time—and guessing badly. It was hard for him to co-relate the depth of our keel with the amount of water necessary to keep us afloat. As a misjudger of necessary depths, the man was certainly in a class by himself.

Only very rarely did we see any human beings. When we did, it was only a few Esquimos in their canoes, or kyaks as they are called.

These kyaks were very small craft built to carry one person only, and the Esquimos were adepts at handling them. Each kyak had a watertight skin deck, which was so fastened about the paddler's waist that he could turn the craft right over without swamping. The Esquimos were constantly doing this—turning the kyaks right over as they sat in them and coming up on the other side. It seemed to be some sort of game they were playing; but to the uninitiated it was extremely difficult, as any white man who has tried will have discovered.

I have said that a kyak was built to carry one person only; but there was an occasion when three of them were made to carry six men. This was when six Esquimos, who had come aboard our schooner, wanted to get ashore and there were only three kyaks available. It looked as if they were up against a difficult proposition; until at last one of them hit on the idea of lashing the three kyaks together so as to form a kind of raft. Under such conditions, though the passage to the shore had to be negotiated with the greatest care, the position of

the men being most precarious, it was accomplished quite safely.

Though human beings were scarce, we frequently came across herds of deer—mostly caribou. There were numerous islands in the Inlet, and some of them were covered with these animals. On one island we shot ten caribou without the least trouble. At another place, the deer entered the water to swim across the Inlet, and some Esquimos in their kyaks went after them and speared them as they swam. They then got the bodies of the animals on to their kyaks and took them ashore. It was all most expertly done. But, then, the Esquimos were natural hunters. They knew all there was to know about the habits, habitats, and the rest of it, of the Arctic animals.

One of the native devices for getting close to a herd of seals without the animals suspecting them was to imitate the movements of a seal. Completely covered in his fur clothing, an Esquimo at a distance could easily make himself look like a seal. He would get down on his hands and knees, and made flapping movements with his hands as he went along. So clever were the Esquimos at it, that they could get right within spearing distance before the seals realized them for what they were. But, alas! such cleverness in disguising themselves had more than once been the stalkers' undoing. A white seal-hunter, or other person armed with a rifle, mistook them for seals and shot them!

The end of our final journey came in sight at last, and we anchored at the entrance to Baker Lake. After all the weary months of endeavour, the journey into the interior in pursuit of the

Esquimo murderers were now to begin. But I was to have nothing to do with that part of the job, which was the work of Inspector Beyts and his party. I had done my part in helping to bring the Inspector to this remote spot. As soon as we had landed him and his party, his guides, dogs and stores, we left them and headed back along the Inlet. There was no time to lose. Every hour brought the freeze-up nearer. We managed to make it all right, however, and headed off south down the Hudson Bay to Port Nelson, which place we reached after a terrific dusting.

Actually, as I have indicated, Port Nelson was no great shakes of a place; but after our rough times in the farther north—well, our police quarters, built of logs though they were, had all the air of a finely comfortable home.

And the Esquimo murderers? Inspector Beyts found them—at least, he found only one of them, the other having died in the meantime. The survivor the Inspector took away to the civilization of the south by an inland route, where he was kept for some time, shown the wonders of the white man's land, and then sent back to his frozen north. In the circumstances, the authorities were not disposed to deal harshly with the culprit. And on returning to his people as he did, filled with the wonders that he had seen in the cities, the man would be a valuable civilizing agent.

CHAPTER XVII

EUPHRATES ADVENTURE

WITH the coming of the Great War I left the Mounted Police. I received a commission in the Canadian Army, but was claimed by the Navy and given command of a mine-sweeper, and soon after the War was over found myself in Mesopotamia. With about forty other master-mariners and officers, I had been sent there to prepare, inspect for trials, and take back home to their own countries various vessels which had been brought to Mesopotamia for river service during the War. We held commissions in the I.W.T.—the Inland Water Transport—a marine section of the Royal Engineers composed of sailors in army uniform. We were known as Israel's Wandering Tribe.

There was a large number of these river-service vessels, originally engaged in river work in India, Burma and elsewhere. And it gave me quite a thrill to find that among them was a vessel which I myself had commanded years before the War, on the Irrawaddy, in Burma. She was a fine craft named the *Galone*: or, rather, she had been a fine craft when I used to run her on the Irrawaddy; since then, like so many of the other craft which had been brought to Mesopotamia for war-service, she had got into rather a bad way. There was a number of gunboats, which had likewise fallen

upon evil days, through having been laid up for so long.

I was not destined, however, to take any of those ships back to their home rivers. Not very long after my arrival at Basra, that queer, sun-scorched port some distance below the junction of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, reports came in of a revolt among the Arabs. Accordingly, I was sent up the Euphrates to a place called Nasiriyeh, to take command of a gunboat there. Nasiriyeh was the centre of a district where the insurgent Arabs were numerous. The town Arabs were more or less friendly towards us; it was the desert men, the Bedouins, who were causing all the trouble.

Not long after my arrival at Nasiriyeh there were reports of trouble back down the Euphrates; and I was sent down in my gunboat to investigate.

Now, that gunboat wasn't a first-class vessel by any means. Out of sixteen such war-craft which had been laid up, she was one of four that had been hurriedly put into commission at the news of the Arab outbreak. Her plates were thin and old, and her speed was definitely nothing to boast about. Her complement was more or less a scratch one; the machine-gunners were some Sikhs we had managed to get together; while the other gunners and the crew, including myself, were members of the Inland Water Transport. We were known as the Military Marine. Altogether, we were rather a makeshift! Moreover, there was no ammunition for the machine-guns, and only one round apiece for two three-inch twelve-pounder guns which were the vessel's chief armament.

As may be imagined, it was no fun taking such

a craft down the river. The stream was narrow and winding, in places amounting to little more than a gutter. And either side the desert stretched away into infinity. Very often the banks were higher than our deck, and we never knew but what there were hostile Arabs hidden in the foliage of the date-palms which lined the shore.

It was a favourite trick of the enemy to hide in the tops of the palms, from where they could command a good view of us and take comfortable pot-shots with their rifles. In other places the Arabs lay flat on their stomachs, close up to the edge of the bank, ready to rake us with their fire. As they lay there motionless on the sand, it was often very hard to distinguish them, and one had very much to keep one's eyes open all the time, be ready for any eventuality.

In such fashion, at any rate, I proceeded down the river. And all went well enough until I was a few miles above a village called Suk-y-shuk, where I very nearly met my end.

As I was standing by the rail, just clear of the cover of an iron protection, there came a burst of rifle-fire from the shore and six bullets smacked on to the metal shelter beside me. The range had been point-blank, but the Arabs hadn't allowed for the fact that the ship was moving. It was one of the narrowest escapes I have ever had. As I have already said, I was prepared for trouble; but somehow I did not expect it just at that moment. We hadn't seen the Arabs; they were lying concealed on the bank. And the sudden rattle of those bullets against the iron plating was startling.

Moreover, such bullets! You never saw ammu-

nition equal to stuff that some of those Arabs rammed into their old muzzle-loaders. Home-made bullets of soft lead, that made a terrible mess of any flesh that they struck, were among them; heads of nails, pieces of glass, stones, and even—sparklet bulbs! Such missiles made wounds that were peculiarly disabling, to say the least of it. Just think of getting a sparklet-bulb driven into your body!

There was a village near the spot where this shooting had taken place, and I guessed that the inhabitants had something to do with it. However, I didn't stop to investigate just then, but went on to Suk-y-shuk, which was the headquarters of the Political Officer of the district. This officer was an Englishman with a lot of experience of Arabs, and he promptly came back with me in the gunboat to the village that I so strongly suspected.

We found the village deserted. The Arabs knew that we were coming, and had promptly cleared out. Empty like that, the place seemed very strange. It was as if it had been stricken by a plague. The people had even taken their goats and other animals away with them. Though the inhabitants had been gone only an hour or two, the sunbrick huts looked as though they had been abandoned for months. Some stood with the doors partly open, and we glimpsed the interiors—for the most part an untidy jumble of rough furniture, clothes, cooking utensils, all bearing signs of having been hastily relinquished. The only indication of life were trickles of smoke here and there from the remains of cooking fires.

The Political Officer lost no time in getting to

work. He was a man of action, and knew the most effective way of impressing these people who had fired on us. The village was simply burnt down.

Talk about a conflagration! It was astounding the combustibility those sunbrick houses and their contents. Everything was bone dry, of course, and a few gallons of petrol were sufficient to set the whole show properly ablaze. Mesopotamia is one of the hottest places on earth—you get temperatures there up to 130 in the shade—and when to the blazing heat of the sun was added the blazing heat of that burning village—well, I guess it was a real inferno. The ground was blistered with the heat. The fronds of the date-palms all round shrivelled up and vanished, leaving only a few blackened trunks. As a devastation, the thing could not have been more complete.

That little job completed, I took the Political Officer back to Suk-y-shuk, and then on down the river to a great swamp area known as Hamar Lake. It had been reported that, on one of the islands abounding in that lake or swamp area, the Arabs were building a brick fort. The building of forts had been absolutely forbidden, but it seemed that those particular Arabs were prepared to defy us. Our job was to show them we weren't to be played with like that.

We soon found the place, and sure enough there was the fort in process of building. The fort was in the centre of the island, and all about its foot stood an Arab town or village—a place called Bani Musharef. We anchored about half a mile away, and sent word to the island that if the stronghold

were not pulled down within twenty-four hours, we would open fire on it with our big guns. No notice was taken of our order; the work of fortification went on just the same.

Now, it was all very well to threaten to blow the fort to pieces, but seeing how terribly short I was of powder and shot I didn't like the position at all. With only one round each for the two three-inch guns, my threat had a large element of bluff about it. Two shells plonk into that fort and village would certainly have done a lot of damage, but I would have felt much happier if I'd known that in doing so I wasn't bankrupting myself of ammunition. There is something peculiarly futile about guns without shells.

As the hours went by, and there was no sign of the fort being pulled down, I liked the position less and less. The idea occurred to me that perhaps the Arabs were somehow aware of my embarrassment, and were therefore treating my threat as a joke. All through the afternoon and night we lay there, no one sure of what was going to happen. There was even the possibility that the Arabs might find some means of raiding us under cover of darkness. There were inhabited islands all over the lake, and communication with the Arabs of the mainland desert was easy. If those people got together in their thousands, they could easily give us a rough time.

Daylight revealed the fort still there. The twenty-four hours' notice was to expire at noon, and as the sun crept up towards the zenith I knew that definite action was going to be called for.

At about eleven o'clock, watching the village

through binoculars, I saw that the people were gathered about in groups. Many were armed, while numbers stood about the higher parts of the fort watching us. Here and there was the glint of field-glasses, as their owners studied every movement on the ship. There seemed to be an atmosphere of great tenseness.

At half-past eleven the Arabs began adding the finishing touches to a part of the fort that was almost completed. This was obviously a gesture of defiance, and was exactly as if they were putting their fingers to their noses at us. The position was the same at ten to twelve, then five to twelve; and at three minutes to the hour I had the gunners sent to their stations. Finally at one minute to the hour I gave an order, and the two guns were slowly swung to the fort.

The threat worked! At once there was a tremendous outburst of activity on the island. People dashed into their huts, grabbed various personal belongings, rushed down to the water's edge and scrambled into canoes and boats of all kinds. Some plunged straightway into the water as they stood—wading and running desperately out into the reeds. There were women with babies in their arms, and women who dragged children along by the hand. There were men with great bundles, and small boys who carried nothing. In each and every case they just ran and ran. Through the binoculars I could see everything very clearly. There was one fat old woman who frequently fell, and an adolescent girl whose clothing had been so torn in the scramble that she was nearly naked.

The training of those two guns on the fort had

certainly proved most effective. The Arabs were willing to do anything rather than have us fire; if hitherto they thought we were bluffing, they had very definitely changed their minds. They began feverishly to pull the fort down, levering the bricks out of position and letting them crash to the ground. They worked like demons, swarming like ants all over the structure.

I don't know how long it had taken to build the fort, but it took only a very little while for its complete demolition. When the business had been carried out to our satisfaction, we took our departure. Nor was it until then that the people, who had fled to other islands in the lake, returned. I don't know which was the more ridiculous—the sight of the villagers fleeing as they did, or the fact that those threatening guns of ours could have discharged only a single shot apiece. Still, our mission had been accomplished very nicely, and that was all that mattered to us.

But that was only one incident in our troubles with the Arabs on that particular trip.

We steamed out of Hamar Lake into the river proper again, and headed back up to Suk-y-shuk. All along the bank were hostile Arabs armed with rifles. They were singing war-songs, and shouting insults at us. The tension was such that it needed only the least little thing to start serious trouble. With every mile of the journey the position became worse. How we got back without an "incident" I do not know.

We had not been at Suk-y-shuk very long, however, when very disturbing information reached us. An armed party of Arabs came galloping to inform

us that a train on the line from Basra to Baghdad had been captured by Bedouins. That was bad enough news, but it was much worse when it was revealed that the train was an armoured one, and that a large quantity of modern weapons and ammunition had therefore fallen into the hands of the insurgents.

The people of Suk-y-shuk had hitherto been more or less friendly to us, but the news of what appeared to be a serious British reverse was likely to bring about a very different state of things. As a matter of fact, the town or village Arabs were never really on our side, but simply sat on the fence; the while hoping that perhaps we should get the worst of it with the Bedouins. Then, too, we had word that the bands of Bedouins were converging upon us; making the position of the Political Officer and the two other white officials at Suk-y-shuk most precarious. So much so, indeed, that another gunboat was sent up to assist me further.

The second gunboat was a long time reaching me, and I was anxiously wondering what had happened to delay the vessel when at last I heard a distant blast on a steam-whistle. I answered in kind, and presently was relieved to see the expected reinforcement arrive. It appeared that the gunboat had grounded in Hamar Lake; having had a great deal of trouble in finding the channel, which had silted up owing to the withdrawal of a dredger that had been at work there some time previously. I explained the present situation to the auxiliary gunboat's officer, Captain Wood, and discovered that in their case they had plenty of ammunition but no machine-guns. As I had six machine-guns and no

ammunition, we made a prompt and gratifying exchange.

We decided to evacuate the three whites of Suk-y-shuk, and take them with us on my gunboat up to Nasiriyeh. As a rather fine old Arab, the Sheikh of Suk-y-shuk, put it, there was no telling what might happen. The sheikh feared he would not be able to hold his own people in check. He had commanded the people of his district not to molest the gunboats on their way up to Nasiriyeh; but in such exciting times he was not sure whether the people would obey.

I liked that old sheikh. He was a man of great personal courage and individuality, but his position was no easy one. On the one hand were his people, growing more and more restless, and inclined to side with the Bedouins; on the other hand, was his desire to stand well with the British. Personally, the sheikh was all for the British. Unlike many of his hot-headed people, he was able to perceive that the British with their resources were bound to triumph in the end.

The sheikh himself superintended the evacuation of the Political Officer and his two companions, and it was entirely due to a direct action of his that the Political Officer was not murdered. As the latter was about to step on to the gangway of my gunboat, which was moored alongside the shore, a young Arab villager suddenly leapt forward, snatched the sheikh's own dagger from his belt, and sprang at the white man. The dagger was a typical Arab weapon, very sharp, and the fellow struck at the Political Officer's heart. But the sheikh threw up his arm, diverted the other's aim, then grabbed

him by the wrist and took the dagger away. It was a very narrow escape; the dagger had missed its objective by only a few inches.

With, therefore, my three passengers, we started off up the river to Nasiriyeh. And, in truth, I should not care to undertake another such trip. The banks were lined with armed men, all lying on their faces with their rifles trained upon us. All among the tops of the date-palms on the shore were others, likewise covering us. There was a constant chanting and beating of drums. Whenever we came to a village we glimpsed armed men watching us from the cover of the houses, and there was no sign of women or cattle in those places—a bad omen. Whenever there is trouble, the Arabs always send their women and cattle away.

Our progress was slow, because of the strength of the current against us. Navigation, too, was tricky; sandbanks and other shallows abounding. It would have been the easiest thing in the world for us to have grounded and stuck fast. The gunners stood at their guns the whole time, and each man on board was as careful as he could be to keep under cover. Altogether, there was something nightmarish about the experience. Those sprawled figures on the banks might have been devilish creatures in a dream.

Finally, one of the Political Officer's white companions began to get jumpy. He was a young man who had not been very long in the country, and it was clear that the position was rapidly becoming too much for his nerves. We tried to comfort him by telling him that the Sheikh had commanded his people not to molest the gunboat,

and that, therefore, all was well. Yet I am afraid there cannot have been any real conviction in our tones. We knew how little even the orders of a powerful ruler could mean in such circumstances.

Mile after mile we made our slow way up the river. The sun beat down mercilessly, while the river reflected the glare up on to us. In our nostrils there was the hot, dry smell of the desert, tainted now and again with the odour of camels, and at times it was hard even to breathe. Mirages were frequent—beautiful lakes with reeds in them and islands, seemingly only a mile or two across the desert. They looked absolutely real. The Political Officer's young companion, whose nerve were beginning to go, stared at them, and stared. Those illusory lakes looked very peaceful and inviting.

The distressed young white man began to talk about leaving the ship and going over to the mirages—of getting at all costs away from the river with its armed menace. It was much the sort of thing that happens to thirst-mad travellers in a desert. Many such a traveller has gone off eagerly towards the so-tempting phantasms, gone on and on across the trackless sand, till finally he stumbled weakly, fell to the ground and succumbed. The young man would have gone on and on in the same way. But of course, we were careful to see that he had no opportunity of leaving the ship.

The river was getting narrower all the time, and the navigation ever more tricky. In addition to the fact that at any moment we might be called upon to fight for our lives against overwhelming odds, there was an unpleasant sense of hole-and-

corner physical restriction, which was most irritating, to say the least.

We got through to Nasiriyeh at last, however. In spite of the difficulties of the navigation, we hadn't bumped anywhere. Nor had we fired a shot, though I must say there was many a moment when we were on the verge of letting blaze. Indeed, to have come through as well as we had done was quite an achievement.

But the journey had been too much for the Political Officer's young companion. By the time we reached Nasiriyeh the poor chap was insane. His case was one of the most pathetic things of the kind that I have ever come across; the man had known for some time that his nerves were going and what the end would inevitably be, but he had fought against it—fought with all his strength. It is no light thing to watch a man struggling to retain his most valuable possession, his reason.

Nasiriyeh wasn't much of a place. It was mostly an Arab town of houses, made of bricks baked in the sun. Its streets—if you can call them streets—straggled untidily along the bank of the river and for some little way inland. There was the usual bazaar, where anything and everything was bought and sold; a sort of Mesopotamian Petticoat Lane, even to the Jewish stall-holders—though most of them hadn't any stalls, but displayed their wares on the ground. Over all, nevertheless, there was a feeling of tension. Just outside the town were large numbers of Bedouins, and an attack was expected at any time. We pinned our faith on a howitzer battery, which by then had been established in the town.

As I have already explained, there were only four gunboats in commission; and two of them were away up the river beyond Nasiriyeh, where the trouble with the Arabs had spread. At the time we did not know what was happening up there, as the Arabs had destroyed the lines of communication. All we knew was that the position was threatening, even as it was threatening with us.

Actually, as we learnt some time afterwards, it proved the end of both those gunboats and their gallant personnel.

One of the craft was destroyed by a big gun, which the Arabs had taken from the armoured train they had captured on the Basra railway. The Arabs got the gun to the bank of the river, concealed it, and waited for the gunboat to come along. When she was abreast of the gun the Arabs fired at point blank range, and sank her.

The other gunboat had the misfortune to run ashore on one of the innumerable shallows—it was the dry time of the year, and the river-levels were very low—and while she was thus at a considerable disadvantage, the Arabs swooped down and captured her. Every man on board was killed, and the heads of most were spiked to the deck. The Arabs then set fire to the vessel as she lay there.

Some time later a relief convoy went up the river in search of this last gunboat, and one of the ships, loaded with horse-fodder and stores, went alongside the bank to effect an engine repair. She was rushed by hidden Arabs, everyone on board was killed, and the vessel was set on fire.

But it was not until some time later that we





END OF FIRE, MECHANICAL TRANSPORT HEADQUARTERS, BAGHDAD

Molten metal and rubber running out of openings in wall

[see page 271

learned of all this. At the time the position at Nasiriyeh occupied all our attention and was becoming more and more acute. The Bedouins were constantly sniping the town, and bullets smacked freely into the walls of the buildings on every side. The headquarters of the snipers was a brick kiln, which they had captured, on the outskirts of the town. The Bedouins had established themselves in that brick kiln in dozens, and the sniping never ceased. Moreover, from the top of the walls of the kiln the Bedouins were able actually to command many of the streets.

The bazaar became deserted, and no man went needlessly into the streets. If perforce an inhabitant had to go from one house to another, he made the journey with all due speed, dodging from the cover of one building to that of the next. Casualties were frequent.

Some of the Bedouins' rifles were of the old-fashioned muzzle-loading kind. These fired all sorts of queer missiles, from nail heads to sparklet bulbs, such as I have earlier described. Many others, on the contrary, were up-to-date weapons, which had been stolen or bought from gun-runners at different times, and with those considerable havoc was wrought. Taught from the early youth to use a rifle, the Bedouins were excellent shots. Even with their old muzzle-loaders I have known them to perform some remarkably fine feats. Those old guns had no proper sight for long distance shooting, such as a modern rifle has, and sighting for a distance would have been more a matter of guess-work in our own case, whereas for the enemy it was a matter of instinct.

The object of the sniping at Nasiriyeh was no doubt to create a reign of terror, preparatory to a raid on the place in force. Actually there was no raid, however; the howitzer battery saw to that. The Bedouins did not know that we possessed any such thing. The battery had been brought and established secretly.

If they had had any idea of the battery's presence, the enemy would certainly not have congregated in that brick kiln.

One night when all was ready, the howitzers, of which there were six, were aimed so that their shells would fall inside the kiln. A star-shell was sent up to give a momentarily clear view of the scene, and the next moment all the howitzers roared. Their six great shells, filled with high explosive, went curving upwards, to drop fairly and squarely into the middle of the kiln and the Bedouins gathered there.

Those Arabs must have been the most surprised people in the world—that is, if they had time for surprise. The shells burst inside the kiln with a roar that filled the night with its echoes. The noise was heard away out on the desert and down the river for miles. Another star-shell revealed that there had been a party of Bedouins out beyond the kiln a little way, and they were hurriedly mounting their camels and horses and fleeing for the desert. A howitzer shell was sent after them to speed them on their way; then another and another, falling just behind them, till finally they were out of range. I have never seen people in such a desperate hurry as those fleeing figures.

Next morning we went over and inspected the

damage. The brick kiln was no more. Neither was the enemy who had occupied it. There were some dead and shattered camels, broken rifles, scraps of clothing, and general litter, all mixed up with the debris of broken bricks. Of the slaughtered Arabs themselves there was no sign. Arabs are averse from leaving their dead on the field, and during the night some of those whom we had seen escaping into the desert had crept back and carried the remains away.

After I had been at Nasiriyeh for some time there came reports of serious trouble among the Arabs on Mesopotamia's other great river—the Tigris. It was thought advisable that we took the gunboats there as quickly as possible. Actually, the position on the Euphrates was quite bad enough; but it was thought that on the Tigris it was rapidly becoming worse. Accordingly, we set forth to run the gauntlet down the Euphrates once more. It is greatly to the honour and credit of the two gunboat crews that they made no protest when they learned they were to make that dangerous river journey again.

Away we went, every man at his post, ready for whatsoever might happen. The current carried us along quickly, and if it hadn't been for the menace of war, it might have been quite a pleasant trip. The ship was comfortable enough, and to have sat in a deck-chair in the shade of the awnings, watching the shore slip past, would have been rather fine.

We were passing through the heart of a country where a great civilization had at one time flourished. The people of Ur and Babylon had once traversed

that self-same river—though, according to all accounts, it is not quite in the position it was then; had moved across the deserts on either side. It would have been easy to picture those ancient peoples as still there—a race who, as excavators have revealed, were wonderfully artistic craftsmen. There were traces of the same artistic ability among the present-day inhabitants—in the fine textiles woven by the women, for example, and their beaten gold and silver ornaments.

But there wasn't much time for such fancies during that trip we made down the Euphrates. It wasn't long before we struck trouble.

We came to a place where there was a pontoon bridge across the river, and, heedless of our approach, the Arabs made no attempt to open it. It was inadvisable to try to drive through it; such an attempt might have resulted in our getting broadside on to the stream, or being flung against the bank. In those positions we should have been at a great disadvantage if the Arabs chose to attack, which in the circumstances they would most likely have done. Indeed, the enemy's refusal to open the bridge was very probably in the hope that we would thus play into their hands, while, moreover, the Arabs would be only too glad to use an attempt at forcing the bridge as a good excuse for opening the attack on us.

As to how we should have attempted to deal with the problem I am by no means sure, if a Major Smith (an I.W.T. man, whom the other gunboat had brought from Nasiriyeh) had not decided to go ashore and try to bluff the head man into having the pontoon opened.

It was a most courageous thing to do. Accompanied by only one man armed with a rifle, Smith landed at the village beside the bridge, got hold of the head man, and talked to him. Talked, perhaps, is hardly the right word; what it amounted to was telling the head man in good round terms the precise consequences if our request for a passage was not acceded to instantly. Smith drew a vivid picture of the whole village being swept by our machine-guns, and of our big guns blowing everything to bits. And the very fact that he had only one man with him when speaking so firmly no doubt made the Major's words more effective still. There was a sureness and certainty about it that must have been most impressive to the old head man.

It wasn't all bluff, though, of course. With our guns we could have made quite a mess of the place. But we didn't want to have trouble. We wanted to get through to the Tigris as expeditiously as possible, and there was no sense in being held up by an engagement that could possibly be avoided.

In the end we were not held up. Major Smith's strong words had their effect, and, although reluctantly, the bridge was opened and we passed through. Our victory, nevertheless, was allowed by the Arabs with very bad grace. As we proceeded down the river, there came much shouting and yelling at us from the shore.

Then, suddenly, there was an outbreak of rifle-fire. They raked us fore and aft. There were hundreds of Arabs, on both sides of the river, and the fronds of all the date-palms on the edge of the banks had men in them, firing at us for all they

knew. Others, again, half-buried themselves in the sand, so as to make difficult targets for us.

Bullets zipped clean through the ship, in one side and out the other, which shows the condition that the vessel's plate was in. We returned the attack witheringly. Our machine-guns especially playing on the date-palms, brought forth a heavy crop. Men dropped out of those palm-fronds like shot birds. Our three-inch guns, also, did great work. I saw one Arab, a big lump of a fellow, standing on a clear part of the bank waving a flag and yelling, get hit by one of the three-inch shells. It was about the most complete bit of annihilation imaginable; the man just seeming to disappear.

The action, indeed, in more senses than one, was a hot one while it lasted. Between the back blast of the three-inch guns and being struck by the Arab bullets, our awnings caught fire. And in that dry-as-tinder climate that would have caused serious damage if we had not managed to extinguish them. It was no fun, however, putting out burning awnings with enemy bullets zipping all over the place. But we managed it somehow, and at last found ourselves out of that particular danger zone. I am thankful to say that there were no fatal casualties in either of our vessels.

But our difficulties, even so, were not yet ended. Presently, as we went on down the river, we came to a place where a huge barge was being sunk across the stream, so as to block it completely. The barge was filled with hay-presses, which had been provided by the Government in an endeavour to improve the peoples' agricultural methods, and the Arabs were holing the barge by means of rifle-fire.

It looked like an impasse. Once that barge was sunk, we should be properly held up. The head man up-stream had let us through the pontoon bridge, but in the matter of this latest obstacle we were faced with a very different proposition!

And then, just when it seemed there was going to be no way out of the difficulty, one of the lines which held the barge to the shore carried away. The force of the current immediately began to swing the barge out of its position across the stream, and it drifted alongside the bank. This left us just enough room to squeeze through; which we promptly proceeded to do, much to the disgust of the Arabs. The breaking of that line had come only just in time; another few minutes and the rapidly filling barge would have been on the bottom. I might mention here that I have often noticed that in time of great danger or stress, it is often some little thing that relieves the situation. I have seen this so often that I am inclined to think it must be the result of the working of some definite law.

Some time after that we came to a village of friendly Arabs. These, at our approach, immediately took off their head-dresses—a sign of friendliness. They were Sabian Arabs, supposed to be descendants of St. John the Baptist, and they offered us presents of fish and other food. I think they were entirely genuine in their protestations of friendship; but, of course, one never knew with their race. Arabs are a tricky lot. None the less, the Sabians were a welcome change after the very different up-river lot.

At last we came to Hamar Lake, where the

Euphrates widens out into a great area of swamp and islands; the region where, as I have previously related, we gave the people of one of the islands twenty-four hours to demolish their fort. There an astonishing sight met our eyes. A large number of I.W.T. river-craft, both passenger and cargo vessels, were simply crowded with Arabs. We thought it could only mean that the hostile people of the region had descended in force and captured the ships; especially since a great shout went up as they saw us.

It was not till we had steamed right up that we learned what had really happened. The Arabs were friendly people, who had heard that the river had been blocked by the sinking of the barge across it. Thinking that the hostile Arabs had thus gained a decisive point, and that the gunboats would therefore be unable to come to their relief, they hurriedly took charge of the various ships that happened to be at anchor in Hamar Lake at the time, in order to prevent them from being attacked. The ruler of the district was Sheikh Salem, a very good type of man who had spent some time in India, and had returned to Mesopotamia very much impressed with the power and justice of British rule.

During the various troubles the sheikh did a great deal of work for us, and I dined with him at his house, in the Arabian style. In sitting down, we kept the soles of our feet turned inward; it being an Arabian discourtesy to turn the soles of the feet outward towards another person. Water was then poured over our hands by servants, and our hands dried on towels. The tableware was mostly native

pottery, the silver of local manufacture, but some coffee-basins were of china. The food consisted principally of roast chicken, mutton, cucumber, and various fruits. The meal began with the sheikh taking up one of the chickens and tearing it to pieces with his hands. A piece of the meat was then passed to me on a native plate, and the sheikh nodded for me to begin. I was careful to eat with one hand only, which is the custom in Arabia. Another custom was the drinking of three cups of coffee in quick succession. It was all really a splendid meal. And being treated so hospitably in this manner was most appreciable after the rough stuff and hostility I had been through lately.

In due course the journey was resumed, and presently I came across a steamer aground in the shallows. It was one of the I.W.T. passenger vessels, and was filled with bluejackets and their officers from a warship lying somewhere down the river. Their idea had been to come up the river to see if they could be of any use. The ship was fitted with machine-guns, and protected by sand-bags.

The naval men, however, being deep-water men, shallow and narrows were not at all to their liking. The charts of that region, too, were most inadequate, and after a journey filled with groundings they had finally stuck fast. They had been there a whole day when we came upon them, and all their efforts to float her off had failed.

I stopped my craft as near as I considered safe. I have a great respect for the Navy, as I served in it during the War, but on this particular occasion it seemed to me that they were by no means using

their wits as they might have done. Obviously a way to get a stranded ship afloat is to lighten her. But that they had not properly attempted to do. Perhaps they were too uncomfortable in their strange environment to think of it; perhaps they hoped against hope that they would manage to scrape off into deeper water somehow. But, as I knew, lightening would prove the only solution to the situation.

"Empty your boiler," I shouted, "and jettison your sandbags! Then I'll pass you a line and heave you into deep water."

This was done, and I resumed the journey down to Basra, which was accomplished without further incident. I quite enjoyed my part in that affair of the stranded ship. It isn't often that a knockabout man of the sea such as myself has an opportunity of giving advice to the Navy!

CHAPTER XVIII

BAGHDAD AND THE TIGRIS

AT Basra we went straight into dock for repairs, and the armouring of the ship properly. Normally, such a job would have taken some weeks; but time pressed, and we rushed it through in about three days. It's marvellous what you can do when you try, even with Arab workmen in Mesopotamia. The dock-work finished, I quickly got under way again, and presently came to Qurnah, the spot where the Tigris and Euphrates meet, and which is said to be the site of the Garden of Eden.

I must say there wasn't much of a garden about the place now, what with the sand and blistering sun, the dreary huts made of sun-bricks, and the generally shrivelled-up appearance of everything. As I heard a man put it once: "The climate must have changed a lot since Adam's day!"

At Qurnah they showed me the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was a shrivelled old thing, little more than a stump, and might have been the remains of any very old growth. The Arabs, however, seemed to believe implicitly that that was the actual Tree whose fruit Adam and Eve ate with such dire consequences to the whole of the human race. They had carefully protected it with cement; and doubting remarks by unbelievers, such as myself, were severely frowned upon.

A little way beyond Qurnah was a queer colony of Jews. They lived in a place which was said to be Ezra's Tomb. The Tomb was covered by a huge dome, and the colony of Jews lived all round it. Those Jews gave one the impression of being remarkably self-contained. They were a tribe, with their patriarchs, religious observances, and customs, contentedly living their own lives. As we steamed past, numbers of the people of the colony stood about the river bank watching us. There were women in long robes, and one or two bearded men with sticks which might have been shepherd's crooks. The Jewish cast of their features was most pronounced. As they all stood, with the great Tomb behind them, it might have been a scene from out of the ancient past.

From Qurnah I went straight up the Tigris, leaving the Euphrates on my left-hand side. There was a mighty difference between the two rivers. Whereas much of the Euphrates was narrow and shallow, the Tigris was wide and deep, with long straight reaches, glittering in the sun. On either side was the inevitable desert; but the fine stretch of water had a wonderfully alleviating effect upon it all. The river was an oasis which never ended.

Day after day we made our way up the stream. Far to the right showed the Persian mountains. So high were they that, in spite of the torrid climate, in winter they were topped with snow. Snow in the midst of all that glittering heat! It seemed almost as unreal as the paper snow in a snowstorm on the stage. How, at times, we longed for a bit of something so cool as snow! Heat! I have been in a few hot places in various parts of the world,

but none of them could compare with certain parts of the Tigris.

I remember one trip on that same river when I might have been making a passage through hell itself. I had a passenger, a Government official, and, stark naked, the two of us took it in turns to sit under a home-made shower-bath we had erected on deck. We spent the whole of our time under those conditions, yet were not really much better off. The water, though drawn straight from the river, was about as hot as the air, and after stepping from the shower, we just steamed and gasped.

Everything, indeed, on which one put one's hand, was hot. One longed for something cool; not only to drink, but to touch, or even to gaze upon. I reflected lovingly on the snows and ice of Canada, where I had spent my three years as a member of the North-West Mounted Police. I thought what wonderful things were snow and ice, and yet when I had known them daily I had cursed them often enough. None the less, it wasn't merely a matter of perverse human nature wanting something it couldn't get; the body cried out for coolness as desperately as a starving man might call out for food. . . .

At length, the journey up from Basra was ended and I arrived at Baghdad. A feeling of panic was rapidly spreading over the place. Reports of attacks by insurgent Arabs were constantly coming in, while among the large Arab population of the city were numbers of rebels and their sympathizers. There was frequent firing, and at various points insurgent snipers were concealed. Political agita-

tion against the British went on vigorously. On walls appeared notices which, translated, read:

ALL EUROPEANS' THROATS WILL BE
CUT AND THEIR BODIES THROWN IN
THE TIGRIS

Yes; they were a pleasant lot, those Arabs!

As a result of popular antagonistic behaviour, officers—I.W.T., military, and others—were forbidden to go about Baghdad alone, and were ordered always to carry loaded revolvers. Also, no one was allowed outside the city's gates, unless on special business. The situation, in fact, was decidedly ticklish. Baghdad was peculiarly defenceless; since, although troops, guns, and equipment were being sent up from Basra, they were terribly few.

In order to deceive the rebels into thinking they were more than was actually the case, the authorities hit upon an ingenious plan. They arranged that the troops should land in the full glare of daylight, and with their bands playing go marching up the main street. Likewise, in the full light of day the guns and equipment were landed, for everyone to see. Then, at night, quietly, taking full advantage of the darkness, the troops, guns and equipment were taken by a devious route to a point on the river some distance from the city, and there re-embarked. Next morning the ship steamed up into the city again, and the troops landed again, and went on marching up the main street with their bands playing, and after them the guns and the equipment, so that it looked exactly

like a fresh detachment arriving. It was simply a case of using in real life the theatrical device by which a few soldiers march across the stage, run round behind the scenes and come on again, thus creating the illusion of a big army. I am sure that this device was largely responsible for the fact that Baghdad itself was not actually attacked by the Arabs during that rising.

My first job at Baghdad was to anchor my gunboat between the two main bridges which span the river, and keep my guns trained on the Arabs' headquarters. This was a threat that, if serious trouble occurred, the Arab headquarters and centre of anti-British activity would be promptly shelled; a threat which made the Arabs very uncomfortable. There were several occasions, though, when I really thought the time had indeed come for me to open fire.

One day the works and offices of our Mechanical Transport Department—a military department—caught fire, and were burned to the ground. There was hardly any doubt about it being the work of the insurgents, and they certainly made a good job of it. There was a great store of petrol in the place, and the whole of it went up. Cans of petrol sailed upwards, exploding, in dozens. Talk about Brock's Benefit! The sky was one large red and white glow, while the river reflected the flames fantastically. The buildings all round were outlined with extraordinary sharpness—those that weren't obscured by the tremendous smoke, that is. People ran for their lives, and it was a wonder that the whole of Baghdad was not burnt down. Maybe if it hadn't been for the threat of the gunboat's guns,

the Arabs might have attempted in the general confusion and excitement to seize the city. We certainly were standing by, ready for such an attempt.

After a period spent at Baghdad itself, I was sent on journeys up and down the river in connection with various risings. One such trip was 366 miles down the river to Amara.

The desert Arabs were expected to attack at any moment, and I arrived to find the Amara natives were in a fever of excitement. It was the time of the Moharrum, the great religious festival, and they were celebrating in thousands. There was a terrific beating of drums, and a stamping in unison; the very earth shook beneath the measured stamping of those innumerable feet. Many of the people beat themselves about the body with heavy chains; others cut themselves with swords. As a mob, they were in a frenzy, and hardly knew what they did. The authorities had erected hospital tents near by, and the ambulance men were kept busy. If the desert Arabs had chosen to attack just then, there would have been a fine old mess. The violently excited Amara Arabs would undoubtedly have joined them. It was, in fact, for the purpose of exercising a restraining influence that the gunboat under myself had been sent. And the move proved entirely effective. Knowing that the gunboat was there, the desert Arabs left Amara alone.

Again and again, indeed, it happened that the arrival of the gunboat on the scene was enough to prevent or put a stop to any fighting. After Amara, I went back up the river to a place called Ali Gharbi, a military post which was actually being

attacked. I could hear the shooting as I approached, and could see the enemy Arabs converging on the post. However, so soon as they saw me, the enemy abandoned the raid and cleared off into the desert. Yes; a great peacemaker was that little old gunboat of mine!

In this way I went up and down the Tigris, calling at all sorts of places, having all sorts of experiences. In some spots the people fled at our appearance; no doubt having taken part in some attack or other, and being afraid, therefore, of punishment. In other instances the people were glad to see us, and all was peace and harmony.

There was often a finely romantic note about many villages or towns, the scene being much the same as it must have been in the very ancient past. I would see, going about their business, bearded and dignified old men, who looked exactly like illustrations to the Old Testament. Many of the women, again, were named Miriam and Rebecca. I would see them at their ancient wells, with stone water-jars held traditionally on their shoulders. Often their hair was long and braided, and they had lovely eyes. They carried themselves and moved in a manner which was the very essence of grace.

Frequently, in places back a little from the river, in marshes and swamps, there would be numbers of flaming flamingoes; those lovely long-legged birds, with their beautifully shaped bodies. The reflected colour of their feathers made the water of the marsh look like blood, especially towards sunset. The marsh then became an absolute spread of colour, for the sun added hues and tints of its

own to those of the birds. It was a sight that stayed vividly in one's mind for a long while afterwards.

I many times came across Arabs fishing from craft called gufers—a kind of large coracle. They managed these gufers very expertly, and could send them along at a great rate. My dog, though, seemed to have an acute dislike of them; and, while for that matter he did not care for any Arabs, those in the gufers came in for his special attention. Whenever the animal got a chance—when we were anchored, say, or lying beside the bank—he would enter the water, swim off to the nearest gufer, scramble up into it, and drive the Arab occupant overboard. The gufer men lived in absolute terror of him. Why the beast should have behaved in this manner, however, I have no idea.

My dog was very friendly, on the other hand, with a baby female gazelle that I had on board—a tiny creature, only a few inches high, with big, appealing eyes and the most delicate of legs. The dog and the gazelle would play for hours round the deck, and they appeared to be able to communicate with one another. There was the most perfect understanding between them, and they were unhappy apart. Whenever the gazelle lost sight of the dog for any reason, she would at once go looking for him.

The great time of all, though, was when, after a spell of travelling the river, we lay alongside the bank somewhere and the two animals were able to go ashore. Down the gangway they went, the dog in front and gazelle pat-pattering immediately behind on her tiny hooves. And then off they tore, away out into the desert; racing each other, streak-

ing across the sand in a great wide circle, maybe with the red glow of the setting sun full upon them. For quite a long time they would keep it up, going round and round, until at last they returned to the ship with heaving sides and lolling tongues. It was impossible to imagine a more delightful and whole-hearted frolic.

At one point on the river bank there was a large passenger vessel, which had been ashore there for a year or more. The height of the water in the river was liable to great variations. In this particular instance, the vessel had gone ashore at the top of the flood season, and the fall of the water had left her high and dry. Some of the crew stayed with her, expecting to get off some time, though they knew not when. But the days ran into weeks, and the weeks into months, and still she continued to lie there.

The ship's people, therefore, started a farm around their craft. They grew wheat and other crops, built hen-runs and reared chickens, and even a cow or two were obtained to provide milk and butter. It all looked very prosperous and comfortable, and I felt that that ship's people were going to be quite sorry when the flood came again and the ship was floated off at last.

Sometimes my superiors at Baghdad seemed to lose sight of me. Officialdom in Mesopotamia could be just as stupid as it is alleged to be elsewhere. There was an occasion when, after lying alongside at Baghdad for some three weeks, I called on one of the higher officials in connection with some business or other. As soon as he saw me, the official jumped to his feet and cried:

"Where have you been? I have wanted you urgently, and for the last two days have been telegraphing all over the country to find out if anyone knew where you were!"

He was thoroughly angry—and wasn't any better pleased when I stepped to the window, which was near the river, and said:

"If you'd looked out of that window at any time during the last three weeks you'd have seen the gunboat lying there alongside all the time! . . ."

At all times, though, there were things happening—things often strange and violent.

One day an armoured-car officer, accompanied by only his driver, went away out into the desert and single-handedly arrested a troublesome and powerful sheikh. The officer just drove straight up to the sheikh's tent and grabbed his prisoner. The man had an armoured car, of course, but the Arabs were about him in hundreds, and had they so chosen they could have obliterated him. As it happened, they didn't even try. The daring of that young British officer seemed to take them entirely aback. And, before they had recovered themselves, as it were, the officer and his prisoner were well away back on the road to Baghdad. In Baghdad the sheikh was roundly rebuked by the military authorities for his troublesome behaviour, and finally sent back to his camp a chastened man. So impressed were that particular lot of Arabs by the young officer's daring feat, that we had very little trouble with them afterwards.

Another officer, however, was far less fortunate in his contact with certain desert Arabs in another district. That officer had his wife with him, and

the ordeal which that woman had to go through was the most ghastly, I think, I have ever known. The Arabs captured them both, but whereas they eventually allowed the woman to depart, they first cut her husband up into pieces before her eyes. Later, it was one of my duties to escort the so-horribly bereaved lady down the river to Basra, where she was catching a steamer for England. I was asked to try to keep her mind off the tragedy, and from visualizing it in all its horrible details; to talk to her, look after her, to try and keep her amused.

Amused! My God! . . .

Yes; one's life was full enough all right. There was a night in Baghdad when a civilian acquaintance of mine came on board in a state of terrible fear and agitation. It was some time before I could get out of him what was the matter. He was so terribly shocked that he could hardly speak. In due time, bit by bit, I learned what had happened.

My friend had had a drink or two earlier in the evening, and afterwards found himself in some sort of house of ill-fame in an unsavoury quarter of the city. He entered a room, and saw lying on the bed an Arab girl. The place was badly lit, and my friend stumbled over towards the bed. He spoke to the girl, but she didn't answer. This seemed a strange way for a harlot to behave, and, after again speaking, the man put out a hand and touched her. It was then he got his shock. The girl was dead. Her last client had stabbed her through the heart. The whole thing had happened only a minute or two before.

As we learned later, the motive of the crime

had been robbery. The girl's rings were torn from her fingers, and what money she had was gone. But at the time, all that my acquaintance—more quickly sobered than ever he had been in his life—knew was that he had to get out of that place as fast as ever he could. He was, indeed, shocked to his innermost being; not only by the ghastliness of having discovered the corpse as he had, but also by the knowledge that he might easily be blamed as the killer.

Another weird experience was in connection with an old skull that I myself had dug up, and which I took to a military friend who was a collector of such things. The skull was a Turkish one, and had a bullet-hole through it—a relic of the Great War. My friend was encamped with some troops; but when I reached the place, he was away, so I left the skull on the desk in his hut. That night an Indian sentry near by suddenly began blazing away with his rifle. When some of the others came running to see what was the matter, the man's eyes were standing out with fear. He said that a Turkish officer had come running out of my friend's hut. The Turk's hands, he said, were at his head, as though it pained him, and he was calling for assistance. The sentry fired, but the bullet seemed to go right through the Turk, after which the mysterious figure vanished.

It was certainly a queer business. There hadn't been any Turkish soldiers in that part of the country for years. Next day, however, the skull was removed and put in an old shed. But that night another sentry had a vision of the Turkish officer emerging from the shed, and in a panic of fear

started shooting. That was a bit too much for all concerned; and in the end the skull was taken away and properly buried, after which the Turkish officer was seen no more. I can give no explanation of this incident. I only know that those sentries were not unduly nervous men, given to imagining things.

For quite a long time the insurgent Arabs continued to make trouble; but in due course columns of British troops arrived from India and elsewhere, and promptly began mopping up the insurgents. It was planned to take one of the relief columns across country from the Tigris to the Euphrates—right up to Nasiriyeh, which by then was in a bad way. As the attitude of the Arabs in that particular part of the country between the two rivers was in doubt, I was asked to go ahead as far as I could and reconnoitre.

I set out with my gunboat along a river called the Hai, which joined the Tigris near Kut and had its other end somewhere in the direction of Nasiriyeh, on the Euphrates. It was an unknown stream, and I had to feel my way along.

The Arabs of the towns and villages stared at us in surprise, but there was no hostile demonstration. Instead, they often turned out a police guard to salute us. If any of them had been anti-British before, they had definitely changed their views. They had heard about the new columns of troops. I have a suspicion, though, that in thus turning against the rebel Arabs, they had various little private wars of their own. At a place called Hai Town, for instance, I heard a great outburst of firing during the night; the people of Hai Town and the

still anti-British Arabs of the desert were "having it out."

For a matter of nearly two days I felt my way along that river between the rivers. Then I reached a spot where the Hai suddenly ceased to be a stream, and became instead a wide area of swamp, with only a foot or two of water, thick with long grass and rushes. That was the end of the journey, and I must say I had done very well in getting so far. Immediately before me was the Arab town of Shatra, which was only a few miles from Nasiriyeh itself.

I turned my ship round and went back to Kut. On my handing in my report, the great column of troops at once set out, and in due time reached Nasiriyeh and relieved it. In the most efficient manner, they cleaned up that section of the Euphrates, as they had other parts of the country, and very soon the great Arab revolt was completely crushed. Not long after that, my adventures in Mesopotamia came to an end and I returned to England.

My book draws to its close. But I cannot finish without relating what will always remain in my memory as one of the most moving of my Mesopotamian experiences. It was when, after the Arab revolt, I had the task, in company with a Graves Registration Officer, of disinterring and taking to Baghdad for burial, the remains of numbers of British soldiers killed in Mesopotamia in 1917, during the Great War.

The place where they lay was some 60 miles up the Tigris from Baghdad, and the skeletons numbered some hundreds, so that we had to make

several trips. The Arabs had destroyed the crosses which had been originally on the graves—Arabs have a strong religious objection to a cross—and great care was necessary in the matter of identification. Also, although we had Arab workmen to open the graves and uncover the remains, they would not touch the bones which lay there. The actual taking out of the skeletons was left to the Registration Officer and myself.

Together we lifted out those poor bones, placed them in sacks, labelled them, took them to the gunboat, and placed them on deck, round the mess-room. In connection with some of them we found poor little bits of personal possessions—a broken pipe, a bunch of keys, a stump of lead pencil. Once, there was a crumpled piece of paper, an unfinished letter, on which were still decipherable the hopeful words: “. . . and so, mum, I don't expect it will be long now before I'll be home with you.”

Where were those men now? Repeatedly, as I made my way down to Baghdad with those sacks about the mess-room, I asked myself that question. Or, was that really all there was to existence in the end—to the whole tangled business of living, loving, adventuring? . . .

THE END

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